THE MAN
OF STRAW

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By
Edwin William Pugh
Author of "A Street in Suburbia"

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So man, who here seems principal alone,
Perhaps acts second to some sphere unknown,
Touches some wheel, or verges to some goal;
'Tis but a part we see, and not a whole.

ALEXANDER POPE.

First Stage

The Glorious Shadow

CHAPTERS I–VIII

THE MAN OF STRAW

CHAPTER I

THE busy street throbbed and hummed with strenuous life. Unhappy Penury in insufficient rags jostled unhappier Penury in faded broadcloth and rusty bombazine on the narrow way. Gutter vendors of pinchbeck trifles, that never could be of use to mortal man, chaffered seductively with such poor wives and mothers as could be brought to tear themselves between vases or a chromo-lithograph for the parlour and boots for their small-yeared offspring. Hapless women, these! Most of them hard put to it to stretch a scanty store of toil-won house-money over a multitude of too pressing needs, yet retaining still, in the deeps of their nature, a sediment, a few, poor grains, of puny, feminine æstheticism. Bull-throated costermongers, hoarse tradesmen, feebly emulative, but with an inflated dignity to uphold withal, rent the dank, hot air with blatant bellowings. Blent with the turbulent uproar were hollower sounds of woe; the shrill wailings of unreasoning babes and sobs of bruised women; feeble cries of pettish appeal from children old enough to understand, but not endure, the woes of their estate; senseless howls and hoots and shrieks from youth for whom the sweets of youth were not; addled utterances of drunken manhood, staggering from ale-house doors; plaintive supplication from women heavy with the cares of maternity, light with the joy thereof: all this, in one unresting flood of sound, ebbing and flowing from the shores of silence. There was a thin rattle of traffic, too, the clack-splash-clack of horses' hoofs, scattering the crowd, threatening the unwieldy barrows ranged in either kerb. Over all was diffused the

heavy, red glare of flaming naphtha-lamps, eclipsing the thinner brilliance of the hissing gas.

Presiding over one tiny stall—if stall it could be called which was but a wooden box on an iron tripod—was an itinerant quack: a spare, unkempt man in a tattered blue robe, reaching down to his broken boot-heels. As he limped and strutted in the gutter, he harangued the crowd thus:

"There you go, there you go, there you go! With half your week's wages in your pockets and the other half liquefied in your little brains. There you go! And your stomachs are rotten and your livers are spongy and your lungs are congested. Faugh! What do you care? Dear me! what do trifles like livers and lungs and stomachs matter to you? It's Saturday. You're out enjoying yourselves. You're going to live up to ten thousand a year to-night—if it's only for five minutes. Devil take the expense! What do you care for money? Come Bill, come Tom, come Sam, come Jack, come every one, no matter whom; fill up your glasses and drink away your guts in my honour. I'm out giving away to-night, and I'm going to *do it in*. I've got a ragged shirt to my back and a bad coat over it; but there's a pocket in my greasy trousers, and money in it, too. I've left all my cares at home with the missus for her to mind. I'm a man to-night with the thirst of Hell in a Heaven of Alcohol. I'm happy. I'm rich. If I see a thing I don't want I have it. That's me! . . . . Eh, isn't it so? Don't I know you? O, you raving madmen!" A possible customer lingered within earshot. He altered his tone. "A moment, madam," he cried. "This," holding up a bunch of withered herbs in his blue-red hand, "this preparation is a specific for diseases of the choler—c, h, I mean—and the bile! It is made from hops, mandrake, podophyllin, sassafras, Peruvian bark that quinine's made from, quassia, dandelion flowers, and buchu leaves. Here is another nostrum," extending toward her an oily green tablet. "This is for coughs, colds, asthma, bronchitis, phthisis, difficulty in breathing, hoarseness, black phlegm, gathered eschars over the air-cells of the lungs that stop you from breathing freely. Try it, lady. The nominal charge is a penny a packet, two for three ha'pence, or three for twopence. An amalgam of the two preparations, which I have

here, is a panacea for every ill" . . . . the possible customer moved away . . . . "except the ill of my own poverty."

He sighed. A woman, flat-chested, unwieldy, with her thin grey hair escaping from the restraining influence of a crushed bonnet of purple velvet, who sat on a reversed basket under the bow of an adjacent barrow, prosperously piled with vegetables in reckless disarray of red and white and green, looked up into the quack's face and offered him sympathy.

"Trade's bad to-night, ain't it, Ike?" she said.

The quack blew on his fingers, smiling.

"People's so blooming healthy," said the woman, grumbling from sheer sympathy.

"That matters nothing, Mrs. Sprunt," said the quack. "The trouble is, they know they're healthy."

He rolled the jest on his tongue and sniggered, feebly.

"How much have you took?" asked the woman.

"Threepence ha'penny," said the quack. "But patience! I shall make my fortune yet. Everything comes to him who waits, you know——"

"If him as is waiting don't die in the meantime, which he generally do," remarked the woman, with large scorn.

The quack laughed and spat.

"That's blood," he said, covering his spittle with his foot. "It's this cold wind."

He shivered.

"Here," said the woman, feeling in the pocket of her apron, "go and get yourself a drop of brandy with that."

She extended a shilling toward him.

"No," he said.

"Get out with you!" cried the woman. "Don't play the fool! You can easy pay me back."

"As a loan, then," said the quack, taking the money.

"Why, of course," said the woman; "you didn't think I was agoing to insult you by givin' it you, did you?"

"No, no, of course not. Keep your eye on my stall, Mrs. Sprunt, will you, while I'm gone? I'll be back in a minute or two."

He moved away. The woman turned to her husband, a stocky man of middle age, clear-skinned, clean-shaven, with a good-humoured face and small, bright eyes.

"I reckon old Ike's about on his back," she said.

"Ah!" said her husband. "Spits blood, don't he?"

"I jest give him a shilling," said the woman. "He's gone off with it to get drunk. Quite happy about it, he was, poor old chap."

"Ah!" said her husband. "It must be pretty rough to come down in the world, Annie, I should think. It's lucky we never had a chance to do it, eh, old gel?"

"You're right," said the woman. A boy lurched against the barrow. "Now then, you!" she cried. "Wot are you up to? 'Pon me word! some on you didn't ought to be allowed out without your mars. You're like kids at a blooming school-treat, a-trying to run four different ways at once! Come out of it, can't you. This ain't no grand stand at Hepsom for you to set on!"

CHAPTER II

"HOLD up, can't you, Bill!"

"I am a-holdin' up. I'm holdin' you up."

"Hold yourself up, then. I ain't no blooming leaning-post!"

"Garnaway, I thought you was!"

"You've had your dinner, I suppose?"

"Yuss."

"Well, lean on that."

"That's funny, ain't it?"

"Moll!"

"Yuss."

"Got a hairpin?"

"What for?"

"I want to stick it into Bill. He thinks I'm his dinner."

"Bli'me, if you was my dinner, I'd put you out of sight in once and quick, too!"

A new voice sounded.

"O, chuck it!"

The old voices joined against the interloper in fierce, ironical array.

"Hullo! Where are *you* from?"

"'Ditch. Where d'yer think?"

"What 'Ditch?"

"Houn'sditch."

"Can you do anythink?"

"Come out in the road and see!"

A woman intervened.

"Leave him alone, 'Enry."

"Leave *me* alone! Leave *him* alone, more like. I'd put him in his hat as soon as look at him, and sooner, the wonk-eyed, pig-nosed monkey! Garn home an' wash your face and let's have a look at you! P'r'aps you think I don't know you; but I do!"

"That's a blooming insult! See this fist?"

"It's big enough, and dirty enough."

"You'll smell it if you ain't pretty civil."

"I *can* smell it, from here."

"Let me get at him!"

"Don't be a fool, Bill, it's only his chaff. Lumme, what's the harm in a bit of chaff? We shall all get chucked out if we ain't more'n careful."

"You go and bile your head for veal!"

The woman was put aside. There was a rushing together of men and a scuffling and a flourishing of grimy fists; hobnails grated on the sanded floor.

Into the turmoil stepped a queer, blue-robed figure with hands outspread in gay deprecation. At sight of the apparition there was a sudden silence; then anger was lost in merriment.

"It's old 'Coughs-colds-and-asthma'!" cried one of the women, glad to seize a possible diversion.

The quack bowed and smiled, and spoke, every one listening closely. Even the barmaid, behind the counter, was moved from her apathy and lent an ear.

"It is truly said," the quack began, "that things done well, and with a care, exempt themselves from fear; but that things done without example, in their issue are to be feared." He paused. "My dear, uncouth, unlovely friend," he said, laying a hand on one man's shoulder, "why should your gentle mistress be likened unto the giddy calf? Is it because she minces well and is not above owning to a partiality for chaff?"

"Quack! quack!" yelled the crowd, in derisive chorus.

"Does this mean that you are all ducks and ducklings? If so, I would that there was peace, too. Duck and peas was ever a favourite dish of mine at this season of the year. There, there, it is but a timid jest. You may forgive me for it only on condition that 'tis seen of you."

"Stow it, Ike, and have a drink."

"A moment. Let me be not rash in my conclusions. Perhaps you cry 'Quack! quack!' because I peddle in physics and bolster up diseased humanity in the howling market-place. Is that so?"

"What are you going to have?'

"I will have a drop of brandy. You are a kingly tribe, you costermongers. I will have a drop of brandy—warm, with lemon. Yes; you are a kingly tribe. An hour, or it may

be more, ago, the wife of one of your kind gave me a shilling—what you call in your full-blooded way 'the nimble bob!' She gave it me with kind words and without ostentation. She did not say to me, 'Buy food for your soul with this; go, pray, before you spend it.' She gave it me, and when I had it, it was my own, to waste, to lose, to spend, or to gamble withal. (A plague on this Shakespearean mood which doth so hamper up my speech and cumber my wit with phrases!) You see, 'tis thus. In my youth I studied the dramatic art. I studied it when I should have studied medicine. My gentle parents were anxious that I should dabble in ill-spilt blood and fret my soul beside death-beds. But I had no stomach for such a life. I loved the fresh pure atmosphere of the footlights, the painted verdure of the canvas scenery. I longed to mount the slopes of Helicon upon the dusty 'wings.' . . . . Your health, gentlemen, your health! Ladies, I pledge you!"

He drank and replaced the empty glass upon the counter. It was at once refilled and handed back to him. This time he waved it aside.

"No, no," he said; "not yet. I am a little addled as it is. My wits fly at random. Give me pause. That last was the seventh this evening. And I have but a poor head for liquor at any time."

"Don't give in yet," one of the men adjured him. "We're just beginning to like it."

"That may be; that may be," said the quack. "Nevertheless you must give me pause."

He sank down on a rough bench against the wall and passed his withered, trembling hand across his brow. His hollow, shrunken cheeks were flushed: his eyes were bright and glistening; his full, red lips sagged loosely. His rude friends gazed and turned away.

"Leave him alone for a bit," they said among themselves. "He'll start again presently. Bli' me! ain't he a caution? Mad, of course! Ho, yuss! There ain't no doubt o' that. Been a toff, they say, and I believe it, too. Them hands never carted sacks of spuds and greens about, you bet!"

One of the women sat down beside the quack. She was coarse and blowsy and not quite sober.

"Feel ill?" she inquired.

"No, no, my dear; a passing mood, that's all."

"You're a good sort, dad. I thought there was going to be trouble just afore you come in."

"Ah!"

"You know what it is when blokes get slanging one another over their beer. It's hands up at a word almost. And my Bill, you know, he's that short in his temper when he's had some, there's no getting along with him at any price. He's all right when he's sober, as quiet as a lamb, and as tender, too. But, you see, this afternoon we knocks off 'cos it's my birthday, and there y'are. It's a drop here and a drop there and we take no sauce from strangers anywhere. Me and Bill we lights in here and gets a-mucking about, no harm in it, of course, when this here bloke from 'Oun'sditch chips in. You know the all-over-yer 'Oun'sditch style! Of course, Bill wasn't going to stand it, and so it got a bit thick. I wouldn't a-minded so much if Bill wasn't bosky. That's a funny thing about Bill. When he's sober he can fight and won't; when he's drunk he will fight and can't. But I s'pose it's the way of the world."

"Yes, yes; it is. The mood and the opportunity rarely meet."

"Shall I get your brandy afore the barmaid chucks it back into the waste tap, or don't you want it?"

"Thank you, I think I will have it now."

The second glass of brandy fired his blood.

"I like you," he told the blowsy woman. "What's your name?"

"Mawther, only be easy with it."

"Martha."

He put his hand on hers. She jerked her elbow at his ribs.

"Now, now!" she said, wagging a fat forefinger archly.

"Now!" he cried. "What do you mean by 'now'? There is no 'now.' What was 'now' just now, is 'then' now. To-day is but to-morrow's yesterday."

"That sounds a bit mixed," she remarked.

"It is a mixed moment; love, struggling hope, and vain-longing, commingling equally!"

He put his lean arm about her waist.

"Be careful, now," she whispered. "Bill's got his eye on me. Take your arm away. Don't be a' old fool! Look, here he comes! . . . . It's all right, Bill."

"I dunno, I dunno," said Bill, standing over them in a

black humour. "Seems to me it's all wrong. You'd better steady on, Mister Ike."

The quack staggered lamely to his feet.

"My dear boy," he said. "It's purely a Platonic passion, I assure you."

"That's all very fine!" said Bill. "But I've mopped the road with a man for less."

The woman stood up between them.

"I'm ashamed of you, Bill," she murmured, trying to draw him aside. "You'll be jealous of the moke next. Pore old man! He don't mean no harm. And wot with him being mad and drunk as well . . . . I'm s'prised at you."

Bill was appeased.

"Your hand, sir," he said, putting forth a cumbrous fist.

The quack gave him his hand.

"You are a fine fellow," he said. "A genuine bit of white carbon. I'm proud to know you. It has been my privilege to mingle with men of every class, from dukes to navvies. I have hobnobbed with lords, and handed tea to countesses across the knees of royalty itself. I have conversed with poets and statesmen, painters, and musicians, in every county of England. You don't believe me?"

"Yuss I do."

"You do! Then you are a fool. No offence, no offence! The truth is this: my tongue is too nimble for my brain. My thoughts cannot keep even pace with it. So I strain the truth, sometimes. It is a habit that grows on one. And, then, a lie is such a fruitful thing. Kill it, and its corpse will but manure the ground for twenty other lies. It battens on its own decay."

"Gather round, mates," said Bill, grinning. "He's off agin."

"Ay, gather round," said the quack. "You'll rarely get another chance to listen to such choice philosophy as I speak. I am a man of parts and culture. I am of mighty intellect, and the scion of a noble race. . . . What matters it that the head of that race is far from me, even as the heart is far from the pocket? . . . . My childhood was a sunny time. I was nurtured in the lap of luxury, and grew up as a flower. The beauty of my youth was as the bloom on the pink of perfection. No shadow of my present

insignificance darkened the shining hours of my past. I outran all my fellows in the hot race for strength and skill: both strength of arm and skill of hand, and strength of mind and skill of thought. I basked in the smiles of Fortune as a whelp basks under the bitch's lolling tongue, careless of the teeth the smile has bared also. The accumulated wisdom of the ages was mine, and I scorned it, preferring the deserts of the earth with their oases to the fair, fat, fallow lands of my fathers!"

There was an outcry.

"O, but we've heard all that loads of times. Chuck us somethink noo!"

"I am an old bottle and cannot contain new wine," said the quack. "I give you what I have. If that displeases you I will not speak at all. This comes of too much talking in the market-place. I am a fool to spout wisdom to churls. I will be silent."

He sat down.

"Get me some more brandy," he said.

"No, no," said the barmaid. "You've had quite enough already, Mister Ike."

He heeded her not. His mind had flown off at a tangent and was busy with his wrongs.

"I protest to you all," he cried, "that I am a most miserable man. Even my philosophy is scouted now, the patient fruit of my long meditations. How is this? Let me be my own echo. It is thus: When first I turned to vending physics in the streets I thought to mend the minds of men as well as their bodies. To this end I discoursed to them the while I ministered to their diseases. With what result? With the result that because I cannot go on for ever grinding fresh corn for these foul asses to smell and put aside with their disdainful noses, but must needs rake together with my wit the provender they will not have, and offer it to them again, and yet again, they flout me out and cry: 'Give us something new.' What would you have? I have tempted you with every kind of mental food. You have taken in none of it. Eat your own vomit. I am done with you!"

Again, he relapsed into silence. The crowd turned its back on him. He went to the bar and leaned against it, crossing his legs loosely. A water-bottle was at his elbow. He took it in his hand and lifted it to the level of his eyes.

The barmaid snatched at it angrily.

"Put it down, Mister Ike," she said. "Don't mess about."

He laughed in her face, extended his arm, and dropped the water-bottle on the floor. There was a grand crash and jangle as the glass shivered into splinters at his feet. The barmaid uttered a little shriek.

"Look here!" exclaimed an indignant barman, vaulting over the counter and taking the quack by the arm. "This is beyond a joke, you know. That decanter cost five bob, you know. *You* ain't got five bob, you know. Come now!"

"Friends," said the quack, "see how a water-bottle that is broken becomes a decanter! In the same way, to be a saint you have to die!"

The barman, a tiny, volatile man, frothed at the lips.

"Not so much of it," he said, shaking the quack roughly. "I've had enough of it, you know. You've broke this here decanter, you know."

The quack laughed.

"My dear fellow," he said, "I wish you would not notice things so."

"Notice things be blow'd!" cried the indignant barman. "I'm responsible for all the glass in this establishment, you know."

"I'm glad to ease you of some of your responsibility."

The barman seized the quack by the collar.

"Hold on, mate, hold on!" said the blowsy woman, Martha. "Don't choke the poor old bloke."

"You shut up," said her unlovely swain. "This looks like a seven-days-hard job. We'd better keep out of it."

His fellows seemed to be of the same opinion. They uttered an approving grunt and began to make for the door, one by one.

The unhappy quack still smiled, though there was a shadow of trouble on his face.

"Don't handle me, man," he conjured the waiter. "Contact with you is unpleasant. Our souls are not *en rapport*. And you reek of heel-taps."

The barman set his teeth grimly.

"Here," said he to the potboy, "go and fetch a policeman."

Two young men pushed forward through the crowd. The foremost barred the potboy's path.

"Wait a minute," he said. "There's no need to lock him up."

"P'r'aps you'll pay for the damage then?" sneered the barman. "Who are you? you know."

"Pay him, Dick," said the young man to his friend. "How much do you want?"

"Five bob, sir," said the barman.

"Give him half a crown, Dick," said the young man.

"Really, sir," protested the barman.

The other cut him short.

"I know all about it," he said. "You aren't going to swindle me.——Give him half a crown, Dick."

He who thus imperiously took control of the situation was a youth of fine bearing, tall and comely. His friend, Dick, challenged attention less magnificently, being a man of small stature and colourless personality. The barman was overborne.

"All right, then, let's have your half a crown," he said, sulkily. The money was paid to him. "And now," he continued, addressing the quack, "you'll please get out of it, you know."

The quack held up a pacificatory hand.

"Young man," he said, "you assume, too readily, in others, that knowledge which you yourself, perhaps, lack. I do *not* know. It is my pleasure to be a fool to-night, and ignorance is my wisdom."

"Are you going, or ain't you?" cried the barman.

"I am going," said the quack. "Gentlemen, good-night. Ladies, my love warm you!"

He kissed his hand and staggered with a puny, ineffective attempt at dignity, toward the door. As he reeled off the threshold into the street, the young man, Dick, essayed to follow him.

"No, no," said his magnificent friend, restraining him; "don't worry about him any more, Dick. We've done quite enough for him. If he gets into any further trouble he'll only have himself to blame."

"O, I'll just see if he knows where he lives," said Dick, apologetically, and went out.

He found the quack lying, face downward, on the pavement, a few paces away. The ground was wet, for it had

begun to rain, and a stiff wind was blowing. Dick stooped down and touched the prostrate man with a gentle hand.

"Now, father, rouse yourself," he said.

"Who calls me 'father'?" gurgled the drunken man.

"One who might be your son, that's all," said Dick. "Can't you walk?"

"O, young sir!" wailed the poor quack. "Give me a little help out of your lusty youth. I am a brute, a beast. I am covered with shame. I loath myself. I am not fit to be touched by an honest man's hand."

"That's all right, father," said Dick. "We all get a bit frisky now and again: young 'uns as well as old."

"I am a brute, a beast, a foul spit!" the quack said, raising a bloody, mud-stained face. "But help me, help me. I have a daughter. Help me, for her sake. She will be anxious for me. It is in her name I implore your assistance. If I am disgraced the disgrace will cover her too. And she loves me, poor girl!"

"I'll take care of you, never fear," said Dick. "Catch hold of my arm. That's it. Now, see if you can stand. Brayvo! Where do you live?"

"Very near here. If you will take me home, my daughter shall pray for you every night."

"I need her prayers, not for the good I've done, but for the bad," said Dick.

"God bless you!" murmured the quack.

The young man blushed in the darkness.

"Never mind about that," he said, awkwardly. "Anybody might ha' done as much!" he added, with modesty.

"I say, Dick, do let the old fool alone and come back and have a drink," said a voice in his ear.

Dick turned and confronted his magnificent friend, who had followed him from the public-house, impatient of his prolonged absence.

"I can't very well leave him like this, poor old chap," he said. "He'll get locked up."

"Let him get locked up, then. Why should we play the Good Samaritan to every drunken dotard we meet?"

"He's not an ordinary man."

"He's extraordinarily drunk, if that's what you mean!"

"But he pleaded so pitifully! And he's got a daughter waiting for him at home."

"The devil he has! H'm! Well I'm sorry for her, poor girl!"

"So am I. It's more for her sake than his I'm doing this."

"O, that's your game, is it! There's a lovely maiden in perspective. I begin to understand. I thought it was odd."

"Don't chaff, old chap. I really am sorry for the old man."

"So am I, *now*. The young lady's put a new complexion on the case entirely. I'm with you in this."

"I think I'm dying!" moaned the quack, burying his face in Dick's shoulder.

"You must expect to die, sir, if you live so fast," said Dick's magnificent friend, laughing. "Hadn't we better have a cab? I don't care much about walking through the streets with this limp sack of a man!"

"Really, old chap," said Dick, "I'm afraid I can't run to it. What with one thing and another I'm nearly broke already."

"What a damned nuisance it is!"

"O, it won't take me more than five minutes to get him home. You needn't come. You go back to the pub and I'll come on after and join you there."

"After what? After you've enjoyed all the girl to yourself? Not me! I mean to share the spoils."

"What a fellow you are for chaff!"

"I'm too old to be caught with your chaff, anyway. Ha, ha! Got a cigarette?"

"They're in my left-hand pocket. I can't leave go of the old man."

"I've got 'em." He struck a match. "Now get along with it. I'll walk behind to keep the flies off. Nobody will know I belong to you, then."

"Now then, father," said Dick. "Quick march!"

He put his arm about the old man and guided him along the narrow pavement. "Where did you say you lived?"

"Number Three, Chater Park Gardens," said the old man. "It's the second turning and you knock twice. O, my head, my head! What a beast I am! What a filthy beast!"

"There, there, there!" said Dick. "Don't you go exciting yourself. There's plenty worse than you."

"I hope not," breathed the old man, fervently.

Already the crowd had dwindled and thinned to scattered groups of two and three, dispersed at wide intervals. The hawkers were busily stowing away their plant; the shops were shutting. Where had raged the stress and uproar of fierce trafficking, brooded silence, broken only by an occasional outcry from some drunken wayfarer or the brisk rattle of a passing cab.

The trio turned into Chater Park Gardens; a quiet street, long, narrow, and winding; a street of dwarfed, distorted houses, black and hideous. There were no humans stirring in it. On either hand an unbroken vista of pavement, blue-grey in the clouded light of the moon, stretched away into the dark. At intervals, a cat picked her dainty way across the road.

"This is the house," said the quack, stopping suddenly and sinking down upon a wet doorstep. "Thank God I'm home. O, but the shame of it!"

The Magnificent rattled the knocker. "Now, for the fair maiden," he said.

There was a short pause. Then the door was opened and a girl, bearing a light, peered forth.

"Is that you, father?" she whispered.

"Yes. God forgive me!" answered the quack.

The girl turned a frightened face to the young Magnificent. He doffed his hat and bowed. The quack struggled to his feet and leaned on his hand against the doorpost. His daughter touched him gently, as if to make sure that it was indeed he, her father. She uttered no word of reproach.

"Who is this gentleman?" she asked. She saw only the Magnificent. Dick stood apart in the shadow.

"He was very good to me; he brought me home," said the quack. "He is a noble lad. Give him your hand, Eva. He is one of God's best."

"O, thank you, sir," said the girl; "thank you, thank you. I——" She gave him her hand.

"It was nothing at all," began the Magnificent, with a wide sweep of the arm. "Indeed, I——"

But the girl interrupted him.

"It was a great deal," she said, withdrawing her hand. "God bless you for it!"

And she shut the door on him.

The Magnificent descended to his friend's level and clapped him on the shoulder.

"What a fellow you are, Dick!" he exclaimed. "Why on earth did you go and hide yourself away like that? You missed all the fun!"

"What a pathetic face it was," said Dick, softly.

"It was a damned pretty face!" said the Magnificent.

CHAPTER III

THE amber sunshine poured in through the muslin curtains, drenching the room with light. It was a little room, plainly, but nattily, furnished. Everything in it was faded and touched with age; it was a clean, bright, honourable age, however, and not unlovely. A bowl of flowers stood on a table against the crisp, white curtains; other flowers, ranged in pots, crowded the window-sill. There was a sewing-machine in a corner—idle, for the day was Sunday, and a great straw work-basket overflowing with reels of gay-coloured silks and cottons, thimbles, scissors, tape, thread. A fire burned in the grate; a kettle hissed and sputtered on the coals. The table was spread for breakfast. A plump tabby-cat had mounted a wide, snug chair; and, with extended forepaws on the white cloth, was nosing the milkjug doubtfully.

Over the fire sat a young girl, reading, with her book open on her knees. The sunshine touched her lovingly, glinting her loose, brown hair, blanching the whiteness of the tiny fist supporting her cheek, touching her smooth brow, glancing off to kiss her eyelids. She was clad in a grey, stuff gown with a cunning frill of lace inserted at the neck, dimly visible through the golden-brown tangle of her curls. A magic tangle for the callow heart of man to be enmeshed in!

"Eva! Eva!"

The voice came from the adjoining room; slow, laboured, husky. At once, she put the book aside and rose.

"Yes, father, yes," she answered, pushing open the door of communication between the two rooms.

Her father lay in bed with the sheets pushed down to his waist and one lean, yellow arm, exposed to the elbow, lying outside the patchwork counterpane. A blood-stained cloth was bound about his head.

"What day is it?" he asked. "How long have I been here? Am I ill?"

She faltered. He put his hand to his head.

"What is all this?" he asked, touching the blood-stained cloth. "Have I had an accident?"

"You fell down, father, and cut your head."

"My head! What day is it?"

"Sunday."

He muttered, "Sunday? Sunday?" Then, suddenly, he rolled over with a groan and buried his quivering face in the pillow. "I remember now; I remember now!" he said. "O, Eva, my child, go away. Don't look at me. I shall sully your eyes."

The girl's lip trembled. She put her hand on his shoulder.

"Hush, father, hush," she said, and stooped down and kissed his hair.

"No, no, no, no," he cried, pushing her from him. "Don't touch me! Don't come near me!"

She caught his hand and locked it in her own.

"My dear, good girl! My poor little Eva!" he murmured, sobbing.

She caught her breath in a tiny gasp that did not reach him; then, smiling to kill her tears, she put forth her hand again and touched his hot, grey head caressingly.

There was silence for a space.

"And you shall have a snug room all to yourself, dad——"

"With double doors to it, Eva."

"Double doors?"

"Yes, double doors. I insist on double doors. And a big, fat, dropsical fig-tree rattling its leaves against the window, too. I insist on that. Yes, and birds in the tree, lusty-throated birds, sweet-singing birds, courting birds, none of your shrewish sparrows!"

"O, dad!"

"Not a word, Eva, not a word. I am very determined about those birds; I'll have good, merry, nimble, gentle birds or none at all, my dear."

"Well, you shall have your birds—not *in* the room, though, of course!"

"Of course not! Bless me, what a girl you are!"

"Let me see. And, then, there'll have to be hundreds and hundreds of books, won't there. (O, what an ogre you will be!) And a big, broad, high-backed writing-table——"

"Of oak."

"Won't cedar——?"

"No, no, my dear—oak, good, solid, black oak. It must be oak!"

"Very well, you cormorant of a father, you! Oak it shall be. And lots of little, artful drawers in it, and—what do you call 'em?—pigeonholes. O, and one of those glorious chairs that spin round on a screw! You know the sort. . . . . Then you must have a pair of gold-rimmed spectacles, which you must always wear on your forehead, and forget, and search about for. Would you want a collar?"

"I do rather cling to a collar, love."

Eva laughed. She was sitting on the edge of her father's bed. She had prepared his breakfast for him in the other room, and brought it in, smoking, on a tray, and set it down on a chair close to his hand. He was sitting up in bed, with an old shawl thrown over his shoulders. making feeble play among the viands with knife and fork. His appetite was poor, this morning. It was to beguile him into eating something that his daughter stayed and chatted with him.

"Now, father, now," she said, reproachfully, seeing that he turned his bacon over and over with his fork and scarcely tasted it. "You're not getting on at all. And I cooked it so carefully. Let me cut it up for you."

"No, my dear, don't trouble," he said. "I'm afraid I can't eat it, my dear. It's very nice. But I'm afraid I can't."

"O, you must, dad. I insist on it. If you don't eat it you sha'n't have all those things I was going to buy for you when I get rich."

"*When* you get rich, Eva!"

"Do you mean to insinuate that I shall never be rich, sir?—I, with all my noble blood! I, with all my beauty, too. Fie, dad, you don't deserve the share of the good fortune that is coming to us. Then there's my rich sweetheart, dad. He's another chance of fortune, you know."

"You think of sweethearting, Eva?"

She thought there was a note of wistfulness in his voice.

"You stupid old dad!" she cried, and smacked his hand. "Think of sweethearting! Of course I think of sweethearting. What girl doesn't? O, it's a splendid man that shall come courting me."

"I ask only that he be a man in every department of manliness," said her father, softly.

"I'll describe him to you," said Eva.

"Do, my love."

"They don't grow his sort in these parts, I can tell you," said Eva. "No, no. He is coming from another world to woo me. He is coming from the world of men, where hearts are loyal and tongues are true and arms are strong and brains are clear; where there is no feebly gay vagabondage, no finicking in dress, no fluttering of strained fancy or thin rattle of puny wit. He is coming from the world of men, dad."

"It is a very little world, Eva, and sparsely populated."

"My sweetheart is the king of it. He is tall, of course, and——"

"Don't say 'handsome,' Eva."

"I shall not stickle for prettiness in him, but he must have the right eyes and he must be dark. I can't bear your fair men. Mine must have the glow of health in his cheeks and hair that you can distinguish from his skin. He must have a noble fire in his eyes. Nevertheless, he must be flint to all women save me; I alone will be the steel to strike sparks of love from him. And he must have a good, kind heart. Above all, he must have a good, kind heart!"

"You nearly forgot that, Eva."

"No, no; but it was so in my mind I hardly thought it worth while to say it. Then, he must be a masterful man with men; he must be a leader, not a follower, of others."

"Would you be content to follow him too?"

"I? I should walk abreast with him, trotting all the while to keep pace with his great strides. I should hold his hand, be his comfort, his solace, his companion. I should give him counsel sometimes, but only when he asked for it and I thought there was room for the aid of a

woman's mind. I would not be for ever thrusting my ill-digested views on him. —— And I would love him; O, how I would love him! My love would teach me to forbode his thoughts, to forestall his desires."

"And he?"

"He would love me too, and be tender with me when I fell to a passing weakness or irked him unwittingly with my womanish whims. He would cherish me in sickness and sport with me in health. He would greet me with a hearty word and a fond kiss, and never grow weary of my moods, but always adapt himself to them."

"He might fail in this, Eva."

"Then I would mould myself to his will, curb myself, put the rein upon myself, hold down hard upon my baser nature the knotted hand of strong constraint. Yet always I would be careful never to lose dignity, lest in an evil moment I might chance to fall from my place beside him to the stool at his feet, and never rise again. I would keep a careful watch on my womanhood, never fear, that, having won him, I might hold him. I would be no slack wife to loose him from my arms. You see, I say 'my arms,' and not 'his vows'!"

"You say, too, 'having won him,' yet leave out the winning of him altogether."

"I should be winning all the time. I would not spread myself to snare him; but I would put forth all worthy arts, and think it no disgrace. I would entice him with smiles, cajole his foolish jealousy with frowns, dissolve his anger in easy tears. O, I would wind him about my finger, dad. I would tease him, too, to plumb his sweetness of disposition; only to plumb his sweetness of disposition, dad, I assure you. With no other end than that. . . . . Why do you frown at me so?"

"Frown, my dear?"

"Yes. Am I tiring you with my mad chatter?"

"*You* tire me, Eva. My dear, that were impossible. If I frowned it was because my head pained me, nothing else."

"Do you think you could go to sleep again?"

"I'm sure of it. I believe I could go to sleep on the instant that I closed my eyes."

"I will go away and leave you in quiet then. Give me a kiss, dad."

"A kiss! . . . . Ah, my love, God bless you."

"If it is true, dad, that in blessing others we are blest, you must have a great store of treasure in God's house."

"And you, my child."

She gathered up the tray and left the room. He was sleeping ere she closed the door on him.

CHAPTER IV

THE old man had been asleep an hour when Eva, sitting reading, heard a small commotion outside the room-door. There was a gentle rapping of knuckles on the thin panels.

"Come in," she cried.

The door opened and revealed a man and a woman standing shyly on the threshold. The man carried in his hand a cumbersome burden which he deposited on the floor in a corner. He was a rough man, roughly clad. The most startling detail of his attire was a blue silk neckerchief. The woman was stout and middle-aged; she wore a red dress, edged with green velvet, a black dolman, glittering with countless beads, and a disproportionate hat with white ostrich plumes in it. There were heavy gold pendants in her ears, and about her neck was a massive necklace of silver, culminating in a huge brooch, elaborately chased.

Eva went forward to greet them with her finger on her lips.

"How are you Mrs. Sprunt, and you, Mr. Sprunt? Father's asleep. He's not very well, I'm afraid. Sit down, won't you?"

"Thank you, Miss," said Mrs. Sprunt. "I don't mind if I do, not being a lightweight."

Mr. Sprunt, hat in hand, stood pulling a greasy lock of his iron-grey hair in speechless embarrassment.

"Won't you sit down, too, Mr. Sprunt?" said Eva.

"Thank you, Miss," said Sprunt. "I think I will."

He sat down and rubbed his hands.

"Sprunt ain't got no manners, Miss," said Mrs. Sprunt, jerking her head toward him in eloquent apology for his deficiencies. "He owns that hisself. But put him in the market and he stands alone. There ain't his sooperior nowhere."

"Order, my dear, order!" growled Sprunt.

Mrs. Sprunt smiled in melancholy resignation, and raised her hands.

"You see, Miss," she said, "he talks now as if he was in a taproom or some other fine place. O, Awthur, you're a jool, I don't think! It's lucky for you as Miss 'Ardrop is a lady, a real lady. If she was a duchess or a countess, or one of them there jumped-up hussies as can't set down without a sight of bowing and scraping, and 'After you, me lord,' she'd have you put out. But, being a real lady, you see, she looks over you."

"I hope I'm properly obliged to her for it, Annie," said Sprunt.

"I hope you are, I'm sure," said his wife; "but it's so hard for you to be properly anythink in company that I doubt it. Not but what he has his good points, Miss. As I often and often sez, when he ain't about, he's a reg'lar hat-rack for good points, is my husband."

"I see you've brought father's box and stand with you," said Eva, indicating the cumbersome parcel that Mr. Sprunt had deposited in the corner.

"Yuss, Miss, that's his little kit," said Sprunt.

"Thank you very much."

"Not at all, Miss, not at all," said Mrs. Sprunt, with genteel deliberation. "It's no more than what's neighbourly."

"He give them to us to mind, you know," said Sprunt. "Lord love you, Miss, it's only a mootual give and take arter all. He minds mi-ern when I goes away for a gargle, and I minds his when he——"

"Don't you take no notice of Awthur," said Mrs. Sprunt, interrupting him. "As I sez just now, he a'n't got no manners."

Eva flushed, and bit her lip and laughed. Mr. Sprunt, in limp distress, kicked his left ankle with his heavy, right boot, savagely.

"You ain't looking what I call at all well, Miss 'Ardrop," said Mrs. Sprunt, speaking loudly to cover her husband's discomfiture. "You sets too close over that needlework, that's what you do. You want to go away for a bit into the country, that's what you want."

Eva smiled.

"Well," said Mrs. Sprunt, rising stiffly. "The best of

friends must part some time, I s'pose. Now, Awthur, stir your sticks."

"Ain't we forgot some'ink, Annie?" said Sprunt. Eva had moved to the door of communication to listen if her father still slept. Mrs. Sprunt looked in her husband's face, and saw that he was winking hard.

"O, ah!" she said, lamely. "Of course, we've forgot that."

"Your father give me some money of his to mind, Miss," said Sprunt, addressing Eva. "Two shillings and a hap'ny it was."

He plunged his hand deep into his pocket.

"No, it wa'n't two shillings and a hap'ny; it was only two shillings," said Mrs. Sprunt. "Don't you remember he sez, 'I'll take the odd hap'ny back.'?"

"Of course he did," said Sprunt. "I forgot that."

He was about to lay some money on the table, but Eva put her hand upon his arm.

"No, no, Mr. Sprunt," she said. "It's very good of you; but I couldn't think of such a thing."

"Why," blustered Sprunt, "I do assure you, Miss——"

He faltered, meeting the gaze of her calm eyes, and blushed.

"No offence, no offence," he mumbled, abjectly.

Mrs. Sprunt was untying and re-tying her bonnet strings in a fever of excited confusion.

"You come along, you Awthur, you!" she cried. "Don't you take no notice of him, Miss. He ain't got no manners at all, he ain't."

"And that's true, 'pon my sivvy, it is," said Sprunt. "I'm the clumsiest, fat-headedest, darn-wrongededest——"

"Come along, come along," exclaimed Mrs. Sprunt, seizing him by the arm and dragging him toward the door. "O, you chump! Good-bye, and forgive us, Miss. We never meant no harm."

"Good-bye," said Eva, "and thank you."

"Tell you what it is, Awthur," said Mrs. Sprunt, when they were out in the street again and walking dejectedly homeward. "You never ought to be allowed to go out a-visiting any more. You ain't got no idea at all of polite society. You're like a hap'ny fin-bit of fish, all wind and crackling. What did you want to go and hurt the pore gel's feelings like that for?"

"I thought——"

"That was the mistake you made. Thinking ain't your line. Your line's shouting, and shouters was never thinkers, old man. That's a chip of God's truth, that is. Why didn't you wrop the money up in a bit of paper or some'ink and put it in his box, or chuck it in loose among them herbs an' things."

"It never struck me."

"Of course it never."

There was a thoughtful pause.

"Pore gel," said Mrs. Sprunt, suddenly; "I do feel for her. How thin and white she is. Don't have enough tommy, very likely."

"Couldn't we——?"

"No, don't think it. We got to be very careful, now, I can tell you. She's a proper lady with tetchy feelings and so on."

"Ah!"

"Tell you what, though, we might send the old man a pound or so of grapes, eh? That'd please her. And afterwards. . . . . Well, we could make a start with the grapes. If we sent 'em sernonymous, so to speak, she'd never know. We could do 'em up in a fancy basket. That'd throw her off."

Mr. Sprunt turned the idea over on his tongue.

"What I think of you, Annie is this," he said——

"Law!" cried Mrs. Sprunt, putting her bonnet straight. "What a man you are, Awthur! In the public street, too! But, there, you never had no manners."

The tumultuous departure of Mr. and Mrs. Sprunt aroused the old man from his sleep. He cried out to his daughter. Eva went to him with a smile.

"What was all that clamour?" he asked.

She told him.

"They're very good people, those," he said. "The man is something of a clown; but the woman has an acid wit of her own. What is the time?"

"Two o'clock."

"Haven't you been to church this morning?"

"I didn't like to leave you, father, as you weren't well."

"I'm well enough, Eva. It's merely a headache,

nothing more. I'm sorry you should have missed church on my account."

"I don't mind, dad. Would you like something to eat?"

"I should like a drop of water."

She brought him water, which he drank thirstily.

"More, more!" he said, handing her the empty glass. "I'm all burnt up. My blood is like fire."

"If you are feverish, I don't think you had better have any more water," she said. "Let me go and buy you some oranges."

"No, water," he said. "That's the only thing that will quench this fire. Do you hear? Bring me some water!"

He stared at her with the perspiration glittering on his wrinkled forehead and his mouth working. A paroxysm of coughing shook him. Eva caught him in her arms and held his shaking head on her bosom.

At last he sank back, exhausted, panting piteously. She wiped his hot, wet face. He smiled up at her.

"Eva!" he breathed.

She smiled responsively. He lay back on the pillow. She stood regarding him, her eyes big with unshed tears. When it seemed to her that he had fallen into sleep she moved away and stole swiftly to the outer room, there to press her burning face to the window pane and let her grief have way.

The season was spring; the day, a gentle harbinger of summer. The sky above was blue; the streets were white and clean. The sunlight danced on the house-tops. Merrily-idle crowds passed and repassed across her vision: haggard men and women, decked in holiday bravery, inflated with the invincible human instinct toward happiness; old, old children, solicitous for the welfare of their fellow progeny, anxious for the steady sanity of their parents, but tempering just now the austerity of their demeanour with lapses to frolicsome gambollings and sudden mad excursions into irresponsible gladness; youth, entering puberty, venting its superabundant vitality in aimless horseplay; gawky maidens boisterously adventurous, palpitating on the brink of womanhood; forlornly gay women, arrayed with dingy smartness, creeping forth from foulness to find, in the warm sunshine, bitter-sweet ghosts of a lost time. Romance was hatching in the spring air. The day was alive with happy possibilities.

Eva, watching the scene, forgot her hard present in the contemplation of an untried future.

Suddenly, she started away from the window and withdrew behind the curtains. Her hand fluttered up to her bosom.

A glorious youth had turned the corner and was crossing the road in her direction. He walked doubtfully, yet proudly, scorning the mean earth. Thus it seemed to her. She ran to the glass above the mantelpiece. Then she turned down an upturned corner of the carpet. That done, she hovered doubtfully about the room, re-arranging what was already the perfection of arrangement, straightening equitably-poised pictures, shaking out into comelier folds the incomparable white curtains. But he could not be coming to see her! How absurd she was! The street was a likely thoroughfare to another neighbourhood. Her trepidation of spirit was abated. A chill followed the glow of excitement.

But no, there was his knock at the street-door. Hark! It was his voice in the dingy passage. She hoped the abrupt landlady would be civil to him. He was ascending the stairs. His foot was on the landing. He was knocking at the room-door, now.

She sat down, with what of composure she could muster, and cried, "Come in."

The door opened and he approached her. He spoke. What was he saying?

"Really must apologize. Most unwarrantable. But the old gentleman. Thought I might venture to inquire. Passing, you know."

How tall and fine he was! His presence seemed to fill the room. And how clean and smart and healthy. What strength was in his pose, what fulness of utterance he had! She was whirled away on a wild sea of alien emotion. . . . To him she seemed a somewhat fragile, but very demure and self-possessed young maiden, strong in her bright beauty.

"Please sit down."

He sat down and spread one ungloved hand on his knee. She looked at it. Big, strong, white; it was a kingly hand. There was nothing of boorish shyness in his bearing; his full, bright eyes met hers quite frankly, boldly. She wondered how he could bear to wear his hair,

that grew so thickly and wilfully, in such a hideous, close-cropped fashion. Her hair, beside his, was meagre and colourless; yet she grudged an inch of it. But she was a woman, careful of details of beauty; he was a man more concerned with the worthy realities of life than its dainty fripperies.

"How is your father?"

"He is in bed. He is not well."

"I am very sorry for you."

She was hurt.

"O, sir," she said, quickly. "You need not be. He is a good father, and . . . and . . . He is delicate, you know, and he has fits. He ought never to go out alone. I am always so anxious for him. I am so afraid that he may be overcome by one of these dreadful fits, some day, and people may . . . misunderstand."

She plucked her gown nervously. Her visitor covered a smile with his hand.

"I hope he is not seriously ill," he said.

"Eva! Eva!" cried the slow, husky voice from the other room.

"He is calling me," she said, starting up. "Please excuse me, will you, while I go to him?"

She hurried away. The young man gazed after her and laughed. He rose and surveyed his reflection in the glass. He could hear the conversation in the adjoining room.

"Who is there, Eva?"

"The young man who . . . who brought you home last night."

"I don't remember. But he must be a good lad. Have you a sixpence to give him?"

"S-sh! He is a gentleman, father."

"A gentleman! Young, you say?"

"Yes."

"He must be a human paradox. I should like to see him. Bring him in here."

"But," very softly, "the sheets are so old, father and everything is so shabby."

"I thought you said he was a gentleman!"

"Yes; but——"

"We are clean. *I* am not ashamed. Bring him in."

Eva went to the door and summoned him. He strode

into the little room with perfect composure and sat down beside the bed. The old man held forth his hand.

"What is your name, young man?" he asked.

"John Coldershaw."

"I shall not forget it. You are a good cordial for a sick stomach, John."

"I hope you aren't feeling very seedy?"

"Not now, not now."

He lay gazing up into the young man's face.

"I make a guess that you are like your mother," he said.

"I have been told so, yes."

"She must be a good woman."

"She is . . . . too good."

"No, no, John, though the sentiment does you credit. But I suppose you feel, as I do, that no man ever deserved his mother."

John Coldershaw was silent. Eva was watching him with all her eyes.

"I am an old man," said the invalid, feebly. "And I cannot thank you. But my daughter——"

"She has thanked me already."

He revealed his white teeth to her.

"I . . . . I——" she stammered.

The old man glanced from the youth to the maid, and his grey face wrinkled in a smile.

"Well, well!" he murmured.

There was a little pause.

"Give me your hand again, John Coldershaw," the old man said, suddenly.. "Ah, what bouncing, hot blood! But Youth is an angel we all of us entertain unawares I am afraid. Good-bye, John Coldershaw. I hope you will come and see me again soon."

"I will, sir, certainly."

"I am tired now. Good-bye!"

Eva led the young man from the room, and softly closed the door.

"We are very poor, as you see," she said, bravely. "You must not mind that. I am very grateful to you. I can't say it, but I am very, very grateful."

"It was a mere nothing," said John.

"It was godly," Eva whispered.

"No, no."

"Can I offer you any poor hospitality? A cup of tea?"

"Thank you, no."

"I wish I could do something to prove to you how much I appreciate your kindness to my father."

"You can tell me your name."

"Eva Hardrop. I have yours. I shall not forget it. You will come again?"

"If you will let me."

"I . . . . we shall always be delighted to see you."

He picked up his hat. She hastened to open the door for him.

"Please don't trouble," he cried, flying to forestall her.

She preceded him downstairs.

"Good-bye," she said, with her hand on the latch. "Again, thank you."

"O, Miss Hardrop, I wish you wouldn't," he said, laughing. "It wasn't much to do."

She held out her hand. He pressed it warmly, flourished his hat, and departed.

In the evening of the same day a great basket of grapes, sent by the Sprunts without word or message, was handed in to Eva.

"How noble he is!" she said as she spread them on a plate for her father.

CHAPTER V

JOHN COLDERSHAW'S parents were folk of very humble origin, who had made a competency for themselves by dint of sheer industry. Simon Coldershaw, John's father, was a big, deep, simple man with a great stock of reverent faith in a God he had inherited from his forbears; Isabel Coldershaw, John's mother, had a less pleasant character. She was a victim to the disease of religiosity. Religion was to her at once a relaxation and a nepenthe. The rites and observances of the sect to which she belonged were a perennial source of delight to her. She had no special capacity for faith or aptitude for piety. She was a good woman, and did her duty according to her lights; she loved her husband with a practical affection, adored her son—but not artlessly; and regarded her conscience always. There is scarcely room to doubt that she believed in God—a vague God. In this connection, however, little credit attaches to her. It were even possible to call her belief by some harsher name, to define it as the blind acceptance of a popular prepossession; but I have said she was a good woman, and that disarms me.

The form of religion she had espoused was a hybrid Methodism, a faith that relied mainly on sensation for its life. A prime source of such sensation was the odd custom of "gathering for private prayer." Any disciple of the church was entitled, on the recommendation of the pastor, to convene a meeting of fellows for the purpose of co-operation in prayer or praise. This was a privilege highly esteemed; it was, indeed, the hall-mark of true membership. Mrs. Coldershaw had long desired it, and had frequently importuned her pastor for its extension to her. Hitherto, however, he had refused her petition, on the ground that she could show no suitable cause of extreme grief or joy; her husband was a prosperous builder, he was kind to her; she had a comfortable

home; there was no sickness in the house or death in the family; the alleged tendency in her son to backslide was not enough. Let him fall away in clearer fashion, *then* . . . . He had so fallen away, with triumphal results for his mother. Yesterday, Sunday, she had entreated the pastor successfully; to-day, she was to hold her "gathering for private prayer." The ceremony was appointed for five o'clock in the afternoon.

At that hour, Mrs. Coldershaw, the hapless victim of a foreboding, stood before her husband in anger. She was clad in unaccustomed garb: her outer garments were a pair of boneless stays, a red petticoat, striped stockings of a pronounced type, and list slippers. Her coarse, grey hair was loose on her bare shoulders. Flecks of soap broke the even redness of her arms. She was a little woman, plump of person, thin of face, with a lipless mouth and shrewish eyes.

Her husband endeavoured, quite vainly, to smile away her wrath.

"It's all very well for you to stand there grinning like a monkey with a nut in its cheek," she cried. "But how'd you like it? Here I've been slaving and slaving and working and working and pinching and scraping—denying myself many a little luxury you've never heard of—to get a decent home together, and for what? To have it trampled on!"

"My dear——" protested Mr. Coldershaw.

"Oh, don't 'dear' me! I haven't common patience with you. I can't turn my back a minute without you getting up to somethink—some prank or other. You're no more to be trusted than a child. Standing on my nice noo chairs!"

"I put my hankercher on it. I thought it would be all right."

"You put your hankercher on it! Bah! Hankercher! And pray what good was that, I should like to know. As if a hankercher could keep the pile from being crushed! And what springs d'you think could stand your deadweight on 'em? Hankercher! You're a pretty beauty ter talk about hankerchers! Oh, it's hard, it's hard! Why, I hadn't been out of the room two minutes! I had just soaped my hands when that foreboding come over me. 'That Simon's up to somethink,' I sez to myself; 'I feel

as sure of it as if I could see him.' Oh, don't tell me! went all over hot. I didn't know what you mightn't be doing. 'I must go down,' I sez. 'I can't stop up here with that awful foreboding on me,' I sez. And down I come, and there you was. I should be a pretty sight, shouldn't I, if someone was to come now and ketch me like this. Think what Mrs. Trass would say! No; she wouldn't say anythink—not to me. She'd look, and then she'd go away and spread all over the neighbourhood that I wore striped stockin's or some fine thing. And people would say, 'How do you know, Missis Trass?' they'd say. And she'd say, with that sanctimonious look of hers—the cat!—'Oh, I saw 'em,' she'd say. And she wouldn't say no more than that—I know her! and goodness gracious only can tell what people would think—and all through you. Oh, I've got a sorry bargin in you, I have. You haven't even got a bit of respect for me. No, you must make a laughing-stock of me—hold me up to ridicule all over the place—make people talk scandal about me—the pretty hussies! To say nothink of spoiling my chairs. And me only going upstairs to wash myself and make myself decent to keep your name up. If I was some women flying off to gossip or drink or worse there'd be some excuse for you—not much, but some. Instead of that I was merely washing myself. I s'pose even you can't see any wrong in a woman washing herself. It's a civilized thing to do, I fancy, though there are prejudices agin it I know, and I could mention names—friends of yours, p'r'aps. But no! No!"

"My dear Isabel, I assure you I only got up on the chair because I thought I saw a spot of damp. That was all. I didn't get up on it to amuse myself or anythink. I thought it was damp. It wasn't, as it happens, but I thought it was. Surely a man can think in his own house."

"Some men can't," said Mrs. Coldershaw. "If they could they wouldn't be always standing on their wives' best velvet-cushioned chairs as soon as the poor creatures' backs was turned. All right, I'm not going to argue. But I think—I do think—it's a bit hard when a woman can't wash herself in peace!"

"I'm sure I——" began Mr. Coldershaw.

But his wife turned an indignant back on him and left the room.

He sighed and seated himself, very gingerly, on the sofa.

"I s'pose she'll be saying I mustn't set down on anythink next," he ruminated. "A lot of good it is having best parlours if there isn't 'where to lay your head' in 'em, so to speak."

He sighed once more, and pulled out his pipe for consolation. Remembering, he put it away again.

"Lucky she didn't catch me with it in my hand!" he murmured.

He surveyed his surroundings with gloomy eyes. Everywhere his vision was assailed by hideous dissonances of colour, scarlet being the dominant hue. Chairs, sofa, and a little squat ottoman in the centre of the room were all covered with scarlet velvet. There were scarlet parallelograms on the walls and scarlet roses in the pattern of the carpet. There was scarlet juxtaposed with green and blue, and scarlet rioting amid shades of brown and yellow and pink. On the great broad mantelshelf—loaded thickly with pearl shells, plaster statuettes, gaunt vases a-quiver with prisms, china dogs and cats, and unsexable humans—flaunted two Japanese fans of German make, a hideous discord in scarlet and lemon. The pictures, being mainly illustrations of Biblical narrative or illuminated texts, had due regard for Oriental prodigality of colour. Scarlet geraniums, in nice clean pots of red earthenware, shared the window-sill with yellow calceolarias, pink fuchsias, hard white stock, and blue lobelias. It was colour running to madness.

To Simon Coldershaw's dull perception, however, all this was no offence. He had no quarrel with it on artistic grounds. He believed, vaguely, that it was very splendid and beautiful. He was concerned only with the conviction that it was uncomfortable. Usually the parlour was a symphony in drab, its glories being veiled in holland wrappers. Only on occasions of ceremony did it shine forth, resplendent, as now.

There was due preparation for the company that was expected. On the sideboard provisions were laid out: a cake, swathed in pink paper, on a blue dish; two bottles of wine, ginger and raisin; a syphon of lemonade; a plate of biscuits; another, of apples; another, of oranges. Lest these evidences of carnal tendency should impart a tone of too loose conviviality to the room, there were Bibles

black, and hymn-books in saffron, relief, to chequer the effect. It was godliness qualifying hospitality.

A knock sounded on the outer door. Simon Coldershaw gave a great start and the sofa-springs creaked ominously. He heard the household drudge shuffle, in her loose-heeled way, along the passage from the kitchen to the street-door and pull the latch. There was a murmur of voices, and then to Mr. Simon Coldershaw, sitting disconsolate in lonely splendour, entered Mr. and Mrs. Garner.

"How do, Garner?" said Mr. Coldershaw, rising and speaking with an unexpected gruffness, born of trepidation.

"O, I don't," said Garner, showing his teeth.

His wife, a rickety woman with an ill-judged hat, laughed very heartily, for her husband's humour, the humour of irrelevance, was quite to her taste.

"O, 'Erry," she wailed, touching her eyelids with a gloved forefinger, "how you do go on!"

"I ain't a gun to go off, am I?" said her husband. "But, there, what would life be without a little laughing to liven us up now and agin? *I* ain't one to pull a long face. Let long faces go with short commons, *I* say. Set down, Martha."

Mrs. Garner took the edge of the ottoman, disposed her skirts, and crossed her hands in her lap. Her husband sank luxuriously into an armchair. He was a lean, alert man, with quick small eyes and hard red whiskers. His head was thinly thatched. "There ain't much sense in dressing up the *outside* of your head," he was wont to maintain.

"Now, this is what *I* call a respectable parlour, this is," he said, glancing round. "A parlour you can ask your friends into without a blush. And what a blessing that is!"

"Thank God for a good parlour, Mr. Coldershaw, eh?" said Mrs. Garner.

"Certainly, ma'am, certainly," said Simon.

Mrs. Coldershaw bustled into the room. The limp stays and the striped stockings and the red petticoat were hidden now under a shining silk gown. Her hair was oiled and brushed and fastened up in plaited loops. She wore much jewellery of a solid sort. Her manner, too, was transformed as utterly as her person. She smiled, and her voice was soft. She took Mrs. Garner into a warm embrace, and shook hands cordially with Mr. Garner.

"What a mutual blessing you two must be to one another!" she cried.

"Thank God for a good 'usban', eh, Mrs. Coldershaw?" said Mrs. Garner.

"Ah!" was the murmured response. "If everybody was as lucky as us there'd be more happiness in the world, I'm thinking. But what I say is this: There's love and there's flightiness."

"There's flightiness, ma'am, without a doubt," said Mrs. Garner. "I try to think that there's love too—with God's help I *do* think it. Praise!"

"Let us fight the world on our knees, *I* say," quoth Mr. Garner, unctuously, "and then we shall have love and peace and happiness for ever abiding with us."

Mr. Coldershaw was constrained to say "Amen."

At this juncture other visitors arrived: Mr. Purcey, a lethargic man, pale, soft, greasy; Mrs. Purcey, yellow and withered, with feverish eyes and speech; Harry Wardrop, the converted prizefighter from heathen Wapping, his broken face beaming affability, his toothless mouth drawn out in a wide grin; the Misses Lander, three acid spinsters of even height, plagiarising each other in voice, gesture, and appearance; Mr. Archie Balder, who believed in God for business reasons; Wally Mills and Bob Jumper, two dyspeptic youths, fresh from tilling Derbyshire soil, doubtful of themselves and each other; the Wonderlies, exuding an atmosphere of weak gentility; Mrs. Trass, plump, companionable, with shallow eyes and little white hands. Last, there entered the pastor of them all, Mr. McWirtrie, a loose-limbed, shock-headed man of great faith, small wit, and much simplicity; a worthy man, but too familiar with God's ordinances.

It was a tight fit for the little parlour. Such as were modest found themselves relegated to undignified corners, shut in and shut out alike, where cramping confines made even sleep an impossibility. The air grew hot and moist, for without the sun blazed white on the grey flags through a yellow haze of dust. The single window was opened, but there was little wind stirring, and nothing of coolness in it. Bonnets and wraps were laid aside, and the hymn-books proved handy as fans. Only to tired masculinity was there no palliative to the heat.

The whirl and rush of inconsequent conversation rose

and fell unsteadily, culminating in shrieks at the pastor's entry, ebbing to whispers.

Mr. McWirtrie, obedient to a nod from Mrs. Coldershaw, rose and held up an admonitory hand. The whisperings sank to silence.

"Dear brothers and sisters," said Mr. McWirtrie, "another day has passed and here we are, by God's good grace, alive and well as ever. Some of us are happy, some of us are sad, some has cause for laughter, some has cause for tears. But here we are—still alive and grateful for the privilege."

"Blessed!" cried Mrs. Purcey.

There was a murmur of praise. Mr. McWirtrie continued:

"Sister—and Brother—Coldershaw have invited us here to join with them in prayer for their son—their only son—who has lately enrolled himself under the banner of sin. Mercy! We are asked, friends, to send up our supplications to the Throne on behalf of this poor boy, the apple of his mother's eye, the pride of his father's heart. The Saviour said that 'where two or three are gathered together in My name there am I in the midst of them.' Glorious privilege. Wonderful love, passing the love of women! Jesus is here among us. Think of it. Just here—right in this room—tender, kind, eager to listen, and ready to answer. Let us take hold on Him, friends. Let us draw very near to Him in this hour. Let our hearts go up to Him. A soul is slipping away from grace. Think of it. A precious soul. Slipping away. A soul dear to us all, most dear to his pore, heartbroken mother—and father. O God, be very good to his mother—and father. Be very good to us all. Hear our prayer this day, O Lord, and let our cry come unto Thee. Bereft of Thee, O Lord, we are as sheep without a shepherd, falling prey to the ravening wolves that do so easily beset us. Answer us quickly, O Lord, and to Thee shall be all the praise. Amen!"

"Amen!" echoed every one, and the parson said again: "Amen!"

There was an interval for silent prayer. Then a hymn was given out, and all stood up to sing. First, Mr. McWirtrie read a verse:

> "O, where is my wandering boy to-night?
> Go, search for him where you will;
> But bring him to me with all his blight—"

"Scarred and marked and stained with sin—old in iniquity—young in years—footsore, weary of worldliness—

"And tell him I love him still."

"Blessed hope left still, you see. None too low but can be raised. O, joy! Love, ever bountiful, every ready to bless!—

"O, where is my boy to-night?
O, where is my boy to-night?
My heart o'erflows, for I love him, he knows,
O, where is my boy to-night?"

"Now altogether, friends, very heartily!"

And the first verse of the hymn was sung. Then the pastor read the second verse, adding commentary. Again he said, sawing the air with his great hairy hand:

"Now altogether, friends, very heartily!"

And the second verse was sung. Thus the hymn proceeded, by easy stages, to its final verse. At the end, there was a general re-settling in chairs and the hymn-books once more proved handy as fans.

"And now I will call on Brother Coldershaw to offer up a prayer," said Mr. McWirtrie. "Straight from the heart, Brother Coldershaw. Praise!"

Simon Coldershaw knelt very reverently and prayed, shutting his eyes and turning his face to the light.

"O, God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost, look down on us and bedew us with Thy blessing," he prayed, "for we have no hope but in Thee. In Thee, O God, do we put our trust. Thou hast been very good to us in the past, O, Lord; Thou hast kept us steady in Thy path, O Lord, that our footsteps slip not. O Lord, we do praise Thee for this. ['Hallelujah!' cried the women, shrilly; the men murmured, unintelligibly.] We thank Thee for our health and strength, O Lord. We thank Thee for the rain and the sunshine, the times and the seasons. We thank Thee, also, O Lord, for the love of our wives, and the love of our dear children, O Lord. We thank Thee for a comfortable home, O Lord. We thank Thee for good dinners and enough of 'em. We thank Thee for warm clo'es and a comfortable bed. We know, O Lord, that there is many hungry and homeless, wanderers and vagabonds. Help them, O Lord. Lead them into

Thy ways that their bellies may be filled and the roof-tree grow over 'em. Pour a little of Thy healin' grace into their hearts, O Lord. ['Amen,' cried the men.] And above all, Lord, keep us in the future. Look down on us from Thy Heavenly Porthole and bless us. Make us never weary of serving Thee. Make our feet run glad to Thy service, O Lord. And if any of us backslide from Thee bring us to Thy fold agin, O Lord. Thou knowest, O Lord, that I am not wishful to obtrude private griefs on any one, O Lord, but if Thou canst put it into the hearts of these dear friends to say a prayer for my dear son, O Lord, withhold not Thy power, I beseech Thee. Thou gavest my son to me, O Lord, to lighten a dark hour. Let him not fall into the devil's hands, O Lord. Soften his hard heart, O Lord. It ain't really hard, O Lord. He ain't really bad. It's only youngness and evil companions, O Lord. He loves his mother, O Lord. He don't show it, but he does. For her sake, bring him back, O Lord. For the sake of his mother bring him back; for the sake of the woman as has toiled and slaved and pinched for her boy when times was hard and the wolf was at the door, O Lord, bring our John home agin. We asks it in the name of Thy blessed Son, our Saviour, Jesus Christ. Amen!"

There was a ripple of "Amens." Simon Coldershaw opened his eyes, rose, and re-seated himself. He trembled and seemed shaken to the core. At such a moment it hurt him to be the cynosure of curious, unsympathetic eyes; he writhed and blushed in heavy embarrassment. He wanted the pause ended. But femininity must have its little bout of constrained gossip. The pause lasted five minutes.

Then the pastor said: "P'r'aps Sister Coldershaw will now offer up a prayer?"

"God bless her!" breathed the men.

"Heaven help her!" wailed the ladies, with acrid sympathy.

Mrs. Coldershaw, simpering and bridling, spread a large white handkerchief on the floor, turned up the front of her dress, and knelt down. She knelt stiffly, with her eyes closed, her clasped hands swinging agitatedly.

She prayed:

"O God in Heaven, Father of Mercy, Maker and Ruler

of the world, who didst send down to us from above Thy Son, Thy Only Son, Jesus Christ, to be a Remission and Salvation from sin, hear my humble prayer, I beseech Thee, and let my cry come unto Thee. I am only a pore, weak erring woman, full of sin and unrighteousness, but with a heart to love Thee and a hand to do Thy will." (There was a cry of "Glory!") "I am sore troubled, O my Father. My pore heart is torn with grief. I get no rest of nights. I can't eat. I am like one out of mind. Thou hast not been backward in the fleeting years, O my Father; be not backward in the troublous times that is upon me. I have sinned grievously in Thy sight, but quite unwillingly, O my Father, for I loathe sin and delight in Thy ways. All my days are given up to worshipping Thee. I have no joy but in Thy love and mercy."

She felt in the pocket of her skirt for the handkerchief upon which she was kneeling. A tear, charged with self-pity, rolled down her grey face. She struck it away with her work-grimed hand.

"I come to Thee, now, O my Father, to ask Thee to stretch out a mighty arm to the help of my pore boy. He is going the wrong road, O my Father. He ain't been near his home, O my Father, for nigh on ten days and nights. . . . . Thou knowest well what is in a mother's heart, O my Father: a mother's heart that is breaking with grief instead of being filled with joy, for to Thee all hearts are open and from Thee no secrets are hid. Praise! I have been a good mother to him; I have stinted him in nothink; I have nursed him in illness and sickness; comforted him when he was in pain; I have been glad when he was glad, and sorry when he was sorry, O my Father. I have kept a decent home over his head and eddicated him and fed him with dainties, and looked after him in every possible way. But he has fallen away; he has took to drinking and smoking and going to theayters, and mixing with ballet gels and sech like ungodly creatures. He has give up going to Thy little hall, O my Father, and has threw the finger of scorn at our dear pastor, Thy honoured servant, Mister McWirtrie!"

"Bless him!" cried the ladies in chorus.

"He has found fault with his own mother. He has got airs and graces. A stinking pride has grew up in him. His own people ain't good enough for him. O my Father,

lead him to repentance. Don't let him go on like this, breaking his pore mother's heart, the mother who bore him and brought him up and all. It's very hard, I do assure you, O my Father. Sharper than a serpint's tooth it is to have a' ongrateful child. Break him to Thy will, O my Father. Cause him to see the error of his ways. Hearken unto us, O my Father. Bless us and keep us ever close to Thee and at last bring us into Thy Holy Kingdom, where angel harps do ring, and all is peace for ever and ever, Amen."

"Amen!" cried Mr. McWirtrie, shaking his head.

"Amen!" echoed every one.

Then the pastor repeated the Lord's Prayer, his flock stumbling after him, and falling to silence when he added emendations.

"And now," he said, rising. "We will sing another Hymn. Hymn Number One Hundred and Four. 'When Heaven's Light on Sinai broke.' With all your soul, friends, straight up to the Most High. 'When Heaven's Light on Sinai broke.'"

The hymn was sung, and then Mrs. Garner prayed. Her prayer was long and obscure in diction; she ran overmuch to narrative, even as Mrs. Coldershaw had done; her hearers gathered that her youth had been a godless time, darkened by visits to the Cremorne Gardens and Sunday trips, in brakes, to Epping Forest. She confessed, with relish, that she had tasted cherry brandy.

Other prayers followed, most of them containing more of autobiography than supplication or thanksgiving. The converted prizefighter prayed, swearing freely from sheer ignorance; Bob Jumper prayed: he had a weakness for awkward metaphor; Archie Balder prayed, incisively, from the head; Mr. Purcey prayed, between yawns. Of the ladies Mrs. Wonderlie and Mrs. Trass achieved most distinction. Mrs. Wonderlie appealed to God's respectability; Mrs. Trass thanked Him that her children were not as Mrs. Coldershaw's child. Each prayer had an air of finality, of entire comprehensiveness, that the next prayer invariably dispelled. The pastor himself was last with a few words of easy exhortation.

There was a closing hymn; and then the household drudge dispensed refreshment. It was partaken of with such gusto that it barely sufficed; indeed, Mr. Coldershaw

had no share in the feast at all. Mrs. Trass noted this and drew attention to it.

"Why, Mr. Coldershaw, you're not taking anythink!" she cried. "Mrs. Coldershaw, *do* look after your pore husband. He's had nothing."

Mrs. Coldershaw reddened. She cast one agonised glance at the plates on the sideboard to see if, by happy chance, anything remained. There was nothing; not even a morsel of biscuit; the bottles, too, were dry.

"Thank you, ma'am, my husband never touches sweet things," she said.

"But, surely, you don't call this raisin wine *sweet*, my dear Mrs. Coldershaw," purred Mrs. Trass.

The observation evoked no rejoinder.

"Thank God for a good appetite, eh, Mr. Coldershaw?" said Mrs. Garner, wiping her lips delicately with a corner of her handkerchief and putting down her empty glass and plate.

"Certainly, ma'am, certainly," said Simon.

"There's nuffink like it, ma'am, you take me," interpolated Harry Wardrop. "And I ought to know, I reckon. When I was unregenerit I used to eat eggs sometimes for a wager. I've put away a daffy of eggs in my time, I kin tell you. What should you think now was the highest number of eggs a man could put away in one day? Raw eggs, mindjer, none of your soft biled 'uns."

"Couldn't say," said Mrs. Garner. "Haven't the remotest idea."

"Make a guess, ma'am, jest for sport."

"Eight?"

"Eight! I put away forty-five one night. I started at seven and finished at a quarter past ten. The man I was matched with put away thirty-nine."

"Dear me!" cried Mrs. Garner, with little sympathy in her voice, however. "Well, Mr. Wardrop, thank God for plenty of eggs, eh?"

"Praise!" murmured Mr. Wardrop.

Mrs. Garner turned away and, meeting her husband's eye, shuddered. "Poor Mr. Wardrop is really so dreadfully ugly he almost frightens me," she confided to the eldest Miss Lander.

Mrs. Trass overheard the remark and smiled and crossed over to Mr. Wardrop.

"Please make me laugh," she said, loudly. "I feel so dull. I think it was that—er—raisin wine."

"Make you laugh, ma'am," stammered Mr. Wardrop, "I——"

Mrs. Trass gave a little cry.

"O, I beg your pardon," she said. "I thought you was Mr. Garner. Really, since you've grown them whiskers it's hard to tell t'other from which. I *beg* your pardon; Mr. Garner *do* grow a beard or somethink. It's so very awkward when a funny man looks like someone else. You never know which to laugh at. I *beg* your pardon, Mr. Wardrop."

Mrs. Garner rose with a wrathful shake of her petticoats.

"I think we'll be off, Edward," she said to her husband.

"O, *please* don't go," murmured Mrs. Trass in a hissing undertone. "I want you to tell me how you manage to turn your old gowns so very nicely. I'm sure the one you've got on looks almost as good as new."

Mrs. Garner's hand rose to her trembling lips.

"I think we'll be off, Edward," she said again.

Her husband hastened to join her and they departed.

Their departure was the signal for a general exodus. Bonnets and wraps were resumed; hats were dragged forth from precarious shelter under chairs; umbrellas suffered inadvertent exchange. Mrs. Coldershaw stood in the doorway to bid her guests Godspeed and thank them for their prayers. For the ladies she had a strong, damp hand and a kiss; for the gentlemen, two limp fingers and a wan smile.

CHAPTER VI

WHEN the last guest had departed Mrs. Coldershaw withdrew to her room to slough her best gown and social manner, leaving Mr. Coldershaw to smoke a sweet pipe in the little ante-room at the head of the first flight of stairs. There, free of his irksome collar and glossy broadcloth, he fell to brooding heavily, He was sore with thought of his boy.

A short, brisk knock at the street-door broke in on his meditations. Mr. Coldershaw heard the servant hobble along the passage in response to it. The latch rattled. There was a murmur of voices. Then the servant hobbled back to her kitchen and silence fell again.

Mr. Coldershaw laid aside his pipe, rose, and descended the stairs to the parlour. He opened the door and looked in. At right angles with the door was the raised arm of a sofa and over the arm dangled two dusty boots. He advanced further into the room. His son was lying on the sofa. His jacket was all dragged up and crumpled under him; a cigarette trembled between his white teeth; his hair, black, dishevelled, was spread about his head on the red velvet. A pair of yellow gloves, a silver-mounted stick, and a soft grey hat were flung, with picturesque carelessness, on the ottoman.

Mr. Coldershaw stood and gazed in silence. His son bore the scrutiny calmly.

"Well, dad," he said at last; "how're you blowing 'em?"

"O, I'm all right, I'm all right, Jack," his father replied.

"How's mother?"

"She's well."

"Where is she?"

"Upstairs."

"At prayer?"

"I think she is changin' 'er dress."

"I'd rather hear she was changing her opinions."

The father was silent.

"What's all this blessed paraphernalia about?" asked the son, indicating, with a lazy wave of his cigarette, the plates and bottles and glasses and hymn-books scattered about the room. "Been having a party or what?"

"Your mother has just held a prayer-meeting."

"All these cake-crumbs are crumbs of comfort, then I suppose. How do you account for the wine—sacramentally?"

"There was some refreshment."

The son flicked the ash from his cigarette with his little finger, and yawned. His father wandered aimlessly to the window. There was silence for five minutes. Then the door opened and Mrs. Coldershaw entered the room. At sight of her son she faltered. A momentary pallor overspread her face; then she flushed angrily and her lip curled. She strode to the side of the sofa and seized her son by the shoulders.

"Come off my sofa," she cried. "Who d'yer think you are to make free like this? It's more'n your father dare do, even. Come off!"

Her son laughed—there was a note of petulance in his laughter—and sat up.

"There, there, mother," he said, "don't be childish."

"Childish!" echoed his mother. "Well, if yours is manliness, I'm proud of being childish."

"And mind you this, Jack," added his father, turning from the window and squaring his shoulders. "I'll have you treat your mother with respect."

"I s'pose you've come to ask for money or some fine thing?" said Mrs. Coldershaw.

The young man assumed an injured expression.

"Of course, if you're going to impute mercenary motives to me——" he said, and paused and spread his hands in an expressive gesture.

"Don't impute motives, mother," said Mr. Coldershaw, pacifically. "Give him a chance."

"Haven't I give 'im chances enough already?" asked the mother. "How many more does he want?"

"Give him jest another."

Mrs. Coldershaw hesitated and bit her lip. Her fingers plucked her apron. She pulled up a chair and sat down.

"O, Jack, Jack!" she wailed and covered her face with her hands and cried.

"God knows," she said, tweaking her nose—"God knows I don't want to be harsh on you. I'm willing to forgive you, as willing as willing. I only want you to be good to me and fear God as you oughter."

The young man fingered his chin.

"Don't cry, mother," he said. "*I* don't want to have any ill-feeling."

"There you are, mother, there you are," interposed Mr. Coldershaw, forcing a smile and rubbing his hands. "I told you so. The boy's all right. Now let's all go and have some tea or supper or some'ink, nice and sociable. Goodness gracious me! why shouldn't we be as happy as other folk."

Mrs. Coldershaw wiped her eyes, and her lips met in a thin, hard line.

"Wait a minute," she said. "We've got to settle a few things first."

"Can't they wait till afterwards?" asked Mr. Coldershaw, simply.

"No, they can't," was the tart answer. "They've got to be settled at once."

"Very well. But, now, let's see if we can't settle 'em quietly and comfortably. Why should we get bitter over it? We're all fond of one another. Surely, that ought to be enough to make us kindlike and gentle. Come, now, Jack, you treat your mother with respect and she won't fly out."

"Fly out, indeed!" exclaimed Mrs. Coldershaw. But her husband put his hand on hers and entreated her with his eyes. She sighed and the anger died down in her. "First of all," she began, addressing her son. "What do you mean by staying away from home ten whole days and nights?"

"Gently, Jack, gently," said his father.

"Well, mother," said the young man, "I own I was wrong there. But you know how we were always quarrelling, and what a fearful scene we had last time I was here, don't you?"

"And whose fault was that, pray?" cried Mrs. Coldershaw.

"P'r'aps it was mine," said the young man. "P'r'aps

it was mostly mine and a bit of yours. I'm not trying to put the blame of it on to you."

"Now, that's all right, mother, that's all right," said Mr. Coldershaw.

"I wish you'd shut up," said his wife. "Well? Go on."

"I thought at first," said the young man, "that it would be better for us all if I stayed away altogether, as we didn't seem to be able to get on with one another. But, in a day or two, I felt, somehow, dissatisfied. I got homesick, I suppose. 'Hang it all!' I said to myself, at last. 'I'll have another try to make it up. And then, if we don't agree this time, I won't go home any more.' . . . That's all, mother. And here I am."

Mrs. Coldershaw regarded him keenly. He stooped down to tighten a shoe-lace.

"I don't know whether to believe you or not, Jack," said his mother, at last. "I'd like to, of course, if I could."

"Then why not believe him?" cried Mr. Coldershaw. "Come now, mother, I believe him."

"I wish I was a fool, too," said Mrs. Coldershaw.

Her son put on his hat, and gathered together his stick and gloves.

"Very well, mother," he said, "if that's the way you're going to treat me, after I've humbled myself, I'm off."

Mr. Coldershaw sprang up.

"Sit down, Jack, sit down," he said. "The thing ain't going to end like this. It sha'n't! Jest as we was all getting on so well, too. Your mother don't mean that she don't believe you; she only sez she finds it hard to believe you. Bless me! it's hard for a man to believe that the world's a-floating in space, and that we're only hanging on by our feet like flies agin the ceiling so to speak, but it's true. And you know, Jack—I'm not saying it to make unpleasantness—you know, Jack, this ain't the fust time you've come back and humbled yourself; and generally you've gone away and been as bad as ever afterwards."

"But I really am in earnest this time," said the young man.

"I believe he is, mother," said Mr. Coldershaw. "I do really believe he is."

"Well, then, let him prove it," said Mrs. Coldershaw.

"Let him turn from his evyil ways and give his heart to God. Will he do that? If he does, then I'm ready to believe that he's in earnest . . . . not before."

"You don't understand, mother," said the young man.

"Of course I don't," sneered Mrs. Coldershaw. "How should I? I'm only your mother. I'm only a woman as has seen a deal of the world. You're a boy without wisdom teeth. 'Tain't likely I should understand, is it! No; you have to be very young to understand everything."

"I see it's no good talking to you," said John.

"Give him a chance, mother," said Mr. Coldershaw.

"You shut up!" cried the mother, turning on her husband in a white fury. "What do you know about it? What does any man know about a woman's feelings? It ain't the same to both of us. There's my blood in that boy; there's my life in him. He was all the world and Heaven to me once. I knoo him when he didn't know hisself. Would you like to be mocked at by your own tongue? kicked by your own foot? stabbed by your own hand? . . . . I don't understand! Good God! and me his mother——"

She struck her bosom and cried out huskily, inarticulately. There was silence.

"It seems to me," said the son, "that you're making a precious lot of fuss about nothing, mother. I only meant you couldn't enter into my feelings. Neither can you."

The mother spoke with an eloquent hand, her other hand clutching her throat.

"There, there, my dear!" murmured Mr. Coldershaw, miserably. "Don't upset yourself." He put a hand on her shoulder. She rested her cheek on it.

"You're all right, old man," she said. "Thank God, you're all right."

She was subdued now; softened, almost broken. She sat down and drew her husband into a chair beside her.

"So's Jack," ventured Mr. Coldershaw, after a pause. "Ain't you, Jack."

"I try to be," said the young man, dully. "But I get so little encouragement."

His mother set her eyes on him.

"God be good to us all," said Mr. Coldershaw.

The room was darkening. Outside, the thin voices of children at light-hearted play, rang shrilly. The flowers

in the window whispered in the wind. "God be good to us all!" said Mr. Coldershaw again. His wife sighed and sat up.

"Now Jack," she said, "say what you have to say."

The young man plucked his cigarette to pieces, and scattered the dust of it on the floor. His mother's lips parted in housewifely remonstrance; but she restrained herself. She leaned back with folded hands and waited. Still the young man did not speak.

"I see," said the mother, with a little laugh. "You're determined to go your own way. Simon, you see, too?"

The eyes of the two men met.

"I see," said the father.

The son sat beating his knees. Presently he looked up, sneering.

"O, it's all very well for you two to look shocked and grieved and hurt, and all that sort of thing," he burst forth, "as if I were the most unnatural of sons, and you the best of parents. It's a nice, comfortable position to take up, and it makes you feel very righteous, I've no doubt. Cheap magnanimity generally does!"

"We've paid a good bit for you to learn them big words, Jack," said his father.

"And we ain't done paying yet," said Mrs. Coldershaw.

The young man paused, abashed.

"It's your own fault," he said, peevishly. "You've brought it on yourselves entirely. *I* didn't want to have any unpleasantness. But you're so unreasonable. You won't look at the thing properly. You're choked up with old-fashioned notions and prejudices. Why, a good many parents would be *proud* of me!"

"Yes; yes?" murmured Mr. Coldershaw, interrogatively. "Well, well!"

"They would. Hang it all, I've never reckoned modesty among my vices. Why should I cast about for phrases now? I'm not a fool, and I know it."

"It's a poor sort of fool that doesn't know he's not a fool," said Mrs. Coldershaw.

In despite, John smiled.

"I might have said that myself," he remarked. His good humour was restored. "I can't go on singing my own praises now," he said. "You've disarmed me, mother."

He crossed over to her and stooped down and kissed her on the forehead with an unaffected air of perfunctoriness.

"That makes us quits, then, doesn't it?" he murmured, gaily.

It is thus men kiss their mothers!

"Not quite, Jack, not quite, I think," said his father.

His mother tapped, with an agitated foot, on the ground, her chin in her hand. The young man's face gloomed. He forced a smile.

"Come now, mother," he said. "What more do you want?"

"What more could I want?" asked his mother, bitterly. "You've kissed me!"

"Come, mother; come, dad," said John, impatiently. "Let's have an end of all this stupid bother. I am I, and you are you. We must make the best of one another. It's the only way."

Mrs. Coldershaw shook her head.

"No," she said.

"Dad?"

John turned to his father.

"No," said Mr. Coldershaw.

"But," stammered John, "I thought you were coming round. Does this mean that we are back again at the old, sore point?"

"It means," said Mrs. Coldershaw, "that we're tired to death of your idle, dissipated ways, your black ungodliness. It means that you've got to settle down once for all or be done with us."

"Come, we give you one other chance," said his father, mildly.

"But what is it you want me to do?" asked John, irritably.

"We want you to choose some honest, respectable calling, and stick to it," said his mother. "Yes, we *are* willing to give you one other chance. I had meant to have you turned out, neck and crop, if you dared set foot here agin. But, God help me! the sight of you makes water of my will, and so—you can have one other chance. Mind, it's the last."

"But, hang it all!" cried John. "You don't expect me to make up my mind all in a minute, do you? Give me time to think it over."

"Yes, mother, give him time," pleaded the father.

"No," replied the hard, firm lips, "not a minute. He's had plenty of time to think it over. What has he been doing for the last six months? Not working. Let him decide now, on the instant."

"But what do you want me to be?" whined John.

"You can go on a-studying the law where you left it off, or you can be articled to a merchant, or a' architect, or a' auctioneer, or what you will. We'll buy you a share in some good business, if you like. Or you can jine your father in the building trade——"

"It is 'Coldershaw and Son,' you know, Jack," interpolated his father.

"We don't limit yer choice," continued Mrs. Coldershaw. "But you must choose now."

"And what is to happen to me if I don't choose now?"

"You can go out into the streets and starve, for what I care. Not a penny more shall you have from either of us. A night with that dandified head of yourn on a doorstep wouldn't do you no harm. Your father's had to sleep out for weeks on end, and he's a better man than you. P'r'aps that's why he's better."

"S-sh!" protested Mr. Coldershaw.

"I don't know if you call this a Christianlike way of talking to your own flesh and blood," said John.

"It's a pretty trick, this sneering at Christians," retorted his mother. "It come into fashion jest about when the Fifth Commandment went out. It's a very pretty trick and worthy of you."

"O, don't, don't go on like this," wailed Mr. Coldershaw. "It's too dreadful. John, remember it's your mother you're a-talking to. Mother, remember he's our son."

"I wish I could forget it," said the mother. The thin lips trembled. "Jack," she muttered, huskily, "why do you drag such things out of me? Why do you stand there a-sneering at me in that cruel, quiet way? If you are a gentleman, who made you one, pray? Who sent you to school? Who sent you to college? Who bought you books, and lived on bread and water to pay for it all? We're coarse; we're stupid, we're vulgar, and all that. O, I know you think so. People don't have to open their mouths to tell their thoughts. You put us alongside of your fine friends, and we ain't a

pleasant contrast. They've got noble blood in 'em ; but I never heard that noble blood hurt more in the shedding than the ordinary sort. They can trace back to their great-grandfathers and great-grandfathers' great-grandfathers, perhaps. What of that? To my mind, it's better to ascend from mean ancestors than to descend from great ones. . . . . But, there, there, it's pore sense trying to stop the wind with breath."

She stopped, and her agitated foot went to work again, tap-tap-tap.

"But I don't want to go in for trade at all," said John, peevishly. "It's so sordid. I want to study some art, painting, music, literature, the stage, something not commonplace, something noble and inspiring ! Literature, now. I feel I might do something there ; or the stage, I have ability in that direction ; or painting, painting attracts me. The trouble is to find my line."

"Them things are only play," said Mrs. Coldershaw. "Clever play, p'r'aps, but play all the same. You could attend to writing and acting and painting in your spare time. We ain't asking you to work twenty-four hours a day."

"Why not have another go at the law?" asked Mr. Coldershaw. "You passed your—what was it?—'Intermediate Examination' all right. There's only one more to pass, you said. A little hard study would put you right for that, and then you'd be free to make money hand over fist and amuse yourself at the same time with these other things. Come, Jack, have another shot at the law. I was talking to Mister Wyse only the other day, and he said he was quite willing to have you in his office agin in spite of your articles being cancelled. What do you say?"

John groaned.

"Oh, if only I had no sense of the beautiful, no delicate perceptions," he cried. "If only I was coarse and gross and sordid! But, just to show you that I am not quite the worst son in the world, I will sacrifice all my ambitions, everything, to your wishes. You say 'the law'! Very well, 'the law' it shall be!"

"The law," said Mr. Coldershaw, hastily. Mrs. Coldershaw sat silent, outside the conversation. "The law was merely a suggestion, so to speak. We don't pin you down to anythink."

"But you abide by your choice, mind," supplemented Mrs. Coldershaw.

"Auctioneering, architecturing?"

"I'm not particular about the pattern of my gyves," said John.

"Give us your hand on it, Jack," said his father. "Now, mother! That's right! Dear me! what a fuss about nothink, when we might ha' settled it as easy as easy." His tone of gaiety was forced; a sense of trouble marred his satisfaction at the happy termination of the conclave. He lapsed into wistful silence.

"P'r'aps you'd like to come up and smoke a pipe with me in my room," he said, presently, "and talk it over sociable, eh?"

"I don't care much about it," answered John, sullenly.

"O, but you must come."

"Very well, then."

"And while you're gone," said Mrs. Coldershaw, with pungent irrelevance, "I'll read the Epistles of John."

The father and son went up together into the an room.

"You don't know how happy you've made me, Jack," said Mr. Coldershaw, re-lighting his pipe.

The young man appeared not to care either. He mumble unintelligibly.

"You mustn't take too much notice of what mother says," Mr. Coldershaw continued. "She don't mean half of it. It's only her way, that's all. Why, bless you I like it myself. Of course, we're different, I know that I ain't had your eddication nor nothink. I'm rough."

"O, drop it, dad," said John.

His father lapsed into silence.

"O, there was another thing," he said, presently, with a note of timidity in his voice. "How are you off for money?"

"O, I can rub along all right," said John. "I've got one and three halfpence; enough for a bottle of physic. Don't worry about me. If you gave me any money you'd be saying next, I suppose, that I only yielded just now for what I could get out of you."

"You've a perfect right to have money if you want it," said Mr. Coldershaw. "Why, you know, Jack——"

"I thought I hadn't any rights at all, only wrongs,"

said the young man, with acrid emphasis. "No, dad, I don't want it."

"You do want it, and you must have it. I know what's doo to your appearance, I hope. Take it, take 'em, Jack."

John Coldershaw put the banknotes in his pocket.

"Poor me! poor Esau!" he said.

CHAPTER VII

JOHN COLDERSHAW stayed chatting with his father till twilight melted into darkness, and the loose-heeled domestic summoned them both to supper. He was very merry over the evening meal, rallying his mother across the table with quip and sally till even she was thawed to mirth and gave him smile for smile. The repast ended, he rose and made for the door.

"I'm just going upstairs to dress," he said.

"To put your evening clo'es on, do you mean?" his mother asked.

"Yes."

"You're going out, then?"

"I must. I promised to spend the night with Underton."

"The night!" The thin lips snapped together. "That means you ain't a-coming home to sleep, I s'pose?"

"I can't. I promised Dick—Underton, you know—I promised him I'd stay. He's giving a little party."

Mrs. Coldershaw made no further remark. Her husband sat in a fever of distressed silence. John retired to his bedroom with the springs of gaiety dried up in him.

He was absent twenty minutes. During all that time the father and mother exchanged no spoken word; for, at the starting of the long pause, their eyes had met, and the glance left them with no food for speech.

John came down, buttoned up to the chin, with flushed cheeks, twirling a cane. He shook hands with his father and kissed his mother. She suffered him; it was no more than that. He was on the point of breaking out in sardonic expostulation, but checked himself and went out, humming a light air to emphasize his lofty unconcern.

He said "Phoo!" on the doorstep, and braced his shoulders as if to shake off the atmosphere of home. Then he sauntered jauntily up the dim street on the lookout for a cab. He found one at the corner, gave the

cabman direction: "To No. 10 Wandle Street, Charing Cross," and was whirled away toward the heart of the town.

Wandle Street was a mean thoroughfare near Saint Martin's Lane.

As John allghted from the cab he became aware that every window within sight was opaque with faces. To reach the door of Number Ten he had to bisect a ragged crowd. His brisk rat-tat-tat studded the flat house-fronts above him and on either hand with unkempt heads.

The door was opened by a dirty little woman carrying a hugely disproportionate baby.

"Mister Hunderton?" she said, in reply to his inquiries. "Top-floor back; and mind you don't tread on any childring a-going upstairs, young man." She added, in a perfectly audible undertone, "with your white fronts and your haws and your hee-haws!"

John thanked her and ascended the bare stairs. He found Richard Underton awaiting him on the topmost landing. They shook hands.

"Come in, old man," said Underton. "I was rather hoping you would call."

John followed him into his room, a small, low-roofed apartment, containing a bed, a table, a chair, a washstand, and a huge leather trunk. By the light of a flaring dip John saw that the table was spread for a meal. A newspaper served for cloth; on it was arranged a loaf, a heel of stony cheese, a jug containing beer, a saucer of pickles, and the ruins of a cruet-stand. Floor and walls were alike bare of covering; the ceiling was black with grime and age; two of the four window-panes were broken and patched with brown paper; an oil-stove stood on the hearth, under the chimney, in lieu of grate; there was a green tracery of mildew high up on the walls where the rain had penetrated the crazy roof. Mr. Richard Underton was a queer anomaly amid this squalor. He wore evening dress, rings gleamed on his hands, a gold chain swung from his waistcoat, his linen was immaculate.

"Sit down, sit down," he said, indicating the chair. "I was just having a bit of something to eat."

"I can't stop, Dick," said John. "I merely came to tell you that you're giving a big party to-night, in case you should call for me at any time and suffer cross-examination by the mater."

"Is it a dinner-party or a supper-party I am giving? And how many guests are coming?"

"I didn't go into details, so you can be as magnificent as you please."

"Thanks. Have a bit of bread and cheese?"

"Faugh! I wonder how you can bear to live like this!"

"How can a poor devil of a lawyer's clerk live otherwise . . . . if he wants to enjoy himself, as I do, that is?"

"I don't think I could stand it."

Underton laughed, mirthlessly.

"P'r'aps I am a fool," he said.

He went to a tiny square of glass above the mantel and straightened his tie.

"O, I say, Dick," said John, suddenly, "you know that girl?"

"What girl?"

"The Saturday-night girl."

"Eh?"

"The daughter of the drunken old quack?"

"Oh, ah, yes!"

"I went to see her, yesterday."

"You—— What?"

"Had quite a long talk with her."

"Bunkum!"

"It's a fact, on my honour. She's a dear little thing not quite plump enough for my liking, but all right, barring that. I'm going again."

"And the old gentleman?"

"O, he's a bit of a nuisance—mistook me for the good young man in the tract and all that sort of thing. Still, the girl's worth it. I think she's rather struck with me, too."

"Poor girl!"

"Thanks."

"I beg your pardon. I didn't mean that. I was thinking of that pathetic face of hers."

"There is a sad expression about it. But, after all, that doesn't matter; she's damned pretty. She'll be a change from Hetty, anyway!"

"Good God! how can you compare them?"

"Of course she hasn't got Hetty's 'go.' Still——"

"I didn't mean it that way. What's her name?"

"Eva Hardrop."

"We've got some Hardrops in our office. A Sir Isaac Hardrop. He's just died. But they're rather a rich family, I think. We're going to administer the estate. Still, it's an uncommon name."

"It is, by God! And what's more, the old quack's name is Isaac. Don't you remember they called him Ike?"

"I think they did, now you mention it."

"And he's no common man, either. You might look the thing up a bit, Dick. The old man may turn out to be a relation of this rich old baronet. If so, and there's any money coming in, I'm all over the girl."

Dick looked up into the face of his friend and his brows contracted.

"It isn't at all likely, I think," he said.

"I know that as well as you do, old man," said John. "Still, I like to think she may be an heiress. It makes the affair so much more romantic."

"Do you think so?"

"Eh? Why, of course! My dear Dick, don't you know that it is quite impossible for a poor girl to be more, or a rich girl less, than pretty. Eva was a dainty little bit before; as a possible heiress she is nothing short of beautiful."

Dick laughed.

"But I can't wait here any longer?" John added, looking at his watch. "It's nearly ten o'clock now."

"Where are you going?"

"I am to call for Hetty at the *Momus*. After that I shall probably look in at *The Badgers* before going home with her."

"I'll meet you at *The Badgers*."

"I sha'n't stop."

"Never mind. P'r'aps Hetty 'll have some other girl with her."

"It's a chance. I've got a cab downstairs. If you like I'll drop you on my way."

"Ah, thanks. Half a minute, while I put on my coat. You go ahead, and wait for me downstairs. Or else, when I blow out the candle, you'll be breaking your neck."

"What a hole-and-corner existence yours is, Dick!"

"There are compensations."

"Am I one?"

"Never mind. Go on ahead."

CHAPTER VIII

Miss Hetty Du Cane sat smoking a cigarette in her dressing-room, with her legs crossed under her short skirts and her arms folded behind her head. She was a lady of matronly proportions; her face was full-featured and fleshy; she had large ears, delicately reddened with paint, dyed hair, and bistre-rimmed eyes. Her arms, shoulders and bosom were bare. All that was visible of her was powdered thickly. Her cheeks were rouged to the eyelids; there was greasy salve on her lips and the glint of lead in her scanty eyebrows. Besides diamonds, she wore only a chemise, visible through the loose lacings of a pair of red satin stays, a frill of stiff muslin about the waist, pink tights, and shoes of yellow silk.

The door of her room was suddenly thrust open, and a man entered. She started up with a little cry, and extended her arms. The man, a bloated travesty of his genus, swayed toward her. She pushed him back, so that he reeled and fell against the wall.

"I didn't know it was you," she said, resuming her seat and her cigarette. "I thought it was my boy, my pink pearl, my beardless oyster, Jack."

"You are a very forward young creachaw!" said the man, sinking limply into a chair. "I will have nothing more to do with you. I like a woman to be a mystery, to shroud her charms, to hint at, not reveal, the beauties of her form. You are too obvious altogether. I hate the obvious!"

Hetty laughed in loud derision.

"Come," she said. "Tell me this, Mister Wyber, which of you is man and which is booze?"

"I shall not tell you," replied Mr. Wyber, with a wide sweep of the hand. "I consider such a question derogatory and impertinent."

"What a funny insect you are!" she said, wrinkling her nose.

"I am a butterfly, sipping the sweets of life from every flower."

"A pretty butterfly!"

"I am at once an infant, a youth, and a man——"

"And a cask!"

"I enjoy all the irresponsibility of childhood, with the lust of youth and the strength of manhood. I absorb happiness——"

"And booze!"

"As a sponge absorbs water. I am, besides, a poet and——"

"A beast!"

"And the nucleus of the earth. My world is a world of pleasure; I am its centre of gaiety! I live, for ever, in a paradise of the senses."

Hetty yawned. "I don't know or care where you live," she remarked. "But I wish you'd stay at home more."

"Home! This is my home. I live everywhere."

"If you could make it convenient to die somewhere . . . . and soon," said Hetty, "I should take it as a favour."

Mr. Wyber smiled sadly.

There was a patter of footsteps without. The door was again thrust open.

"Jack!" screamed Hetty, ecstatically.

John Coldershaw faltered and stared, askance, at Wyber.

"Never mind him, he's only a poet," said Hetty. She enfolded the young man in her arms and strained him to her. "Kiss me, Jack, kiss me," she entreated, putting up her lips.

He kissed her. Mr. Wyber raised an eye-glass. He rubbed his hands.

"An idyll!" he exclaimed. "An idyll, 'pon my soul!"

"My rosy boy! my beautiful baby!" gurgled Hetty. "The lovely eyes, the sweet mouth! Ah!"

Mr. Wyber capered wildly.

"O, sweet, sweet!" he murmured. "O, youth! O, innocence! O, tender buds, now first unfolding!"

John put the woman aside and confronted Wyber.

"Who is this damned fool?" he asked, turning to Hetty

and indicating the object of his scorn with a contemptuou thumb.

"I am a mere abstraction!" replied Mr. Wyber.

"A what?" cried John.

"I am a living epitome of poesy!"

"Eh?"

"I am an iridescent feather from the wing of fancy!"

"Look here, how many of you are there, really?"

"I am one, and yet a legion!"

"Would you mind taking all yourselves outside."

"O, cruel, cruel!" moaned Wyber. "May I not wi ness this carnival of passion that is now toward? Bu wait. Here is my card. Come and see me to-night a twelve. You must. There will be others there. The wi shall flow. Warm, languorous odours shall woo col brisk, bloodless chastity. We will dance and sing, a kiss and love, and dissipate our strength. And when t white dawn falls we will paint it red with easy si Come!"

"Yes," said Hetty. "We will come."

"You will remember?"

"Yes, yes."

He kissed his hand and departed. The staggering ec of his receding footsteps died away.

"Mad?" asked John.

Hetty pursed her mouth.

"Ye-es, I'm afraid so, a little," she said. "I rememb him when he was a dear boy, though. He was the firs man I lived with. O, he was so lovely. He used to rea poetry to me—his own, generally. It was divine. I'm rather fond of him still. He's so young and he was s nice. But you're nicer, Jack. Kiss me again, flower!"

He kissed her. She sighed.

"How your heart goes pump-pump-pump!" she mur mured. She raised her head. "No, no," she said. " forgot. You are odious, hideous, utterly horrid! Yo came late. All those kisses are wiped out. I am displeased cold, distant. You are such a tardy lover. I feel I canno forgive you." She smiled to reassure him. "And yet, she said, "I cannot resist you. I am so weak. And yo are like honey!"

"But honey cloys," said Jack.

"You will cloy some day," she said. "That is m

tragedy; everybody cloys. Why don't you ask me to marry you, Jack? You know my sex prevents me from asking you; otherwise. . . . And I have been everything except married. It would be a fresh experience for me. O, if only I were a little less coy!"

She sniggered.

"What does the adamantine heart say?" she asked. "I see," she added, forcing a pout, "it is distressingly silent, as usual. Well, I suppose you had better kiss me, Jack."

He kissed her.

She withdrew from his arms.

"Another!" he pleaded.

She put out her hands.

"No," she said.

He pressed her hard.

"Down on your knees, then," she commanded.

He hesitated.

"But——" he expostulated.

"Down on your knees!"

He knelt on the dusty floor.

"Sue to me!" she cried. "Put your hands together, so."

He obeyed her.

She stooped and kissed him on the forehead. He caught her hands and held her, pressing his lips to hers.

"You're sublime, Hetty!" he whispered, hoarsely.

It is thus men kiss their mistresses!

"You had better wait in the bar while I dress," said Hetty. "The management is so particular, you know. And I quarrelled with the stage-doorkeeper last week. No; you've had quite enough."

John wrested a last kiss from her and went out.

The dressing-room was near the wings of the stage. He threaded his way between stacks of discarded scenery and other oddments of theatrical furniture, walking in wary fear of hidden traps. Single gas-jets, stuck on huge wooden buttresses, hummed and sputtered. From the distance sounded the flat tones of a woman's voice, upraised in hideous song and the brisk music of a strong, but disunited, orchestra. There was a tiny scuffling of rats under the flooring. Once, a fat, black spider fell on his

hand and caused him to cry out in sudden disgust. An aged call-boy of pessimistic countenance, carrying a huge can of beer, clattered past him in the gloom.

The hideous song was ended ere he reached the stage. The singer, an attenuated woman past middle-age, jostled him, shivering, on her way to the common dressing-room. In the wings the chairman of the *Momus*—a man worn with the cares of office, full-bellied, ripe of visage, yet affable withal, and pleasantly thirsty—was conversing, in low tones, with the reigning star, a wizened, blear-eyed youth in an ill-fitting dress-suit and an exaggerated collar.

"My dear boy!" he was saying, "for the sake of Gawd and the management do all you know, the show's going as flat as beer in a wet mug."

The fiddles squeaked, the piano tinkled, and a cornet blared. The wizened youth answered the chairman with an understanding nod and strolled toward the footlights. John lingered, watching him.

"Ladies and the fellers as comes with them," said the wizened youth, making an ironical obeisance, "I am sorry to have to announce that in consequence of my substitoot being ill to-night I am obliged to come myself." He sighed and threw a wink to the wings. The chairman chuckled appreciatively. "It's very unfortunate," the wizened youth continued listlessly, "but I promise you it sha'n't occur agin. Rumble it?" He stooped and addressed the leader of the orchestra. "A few bars in the key of the street, Mister Matchelo, please," he said.

The audience roared approbation. The symphony was played and the wizened youth sang.

"That's a clever young feller, that is," said the chairman, laying a fat hand on John's shoulder. "It's a pity he's so sober. Now, what I want to know is this: Am I to have a drop of some'ink with you, or are you to have a drop of some'ink with me? Jest as you please. Thank you.'

He preceded John through a short passage, pushed open a baize-covered door, and led him into a bar adjoining the auditorium.

"Mine's a drop o' brandy hot," he said.

There was an equal admixture of men and women in the bar. The majority of the men wore long, light overcoats, soft, felt hats, and gaudy silk wrappers drawn up close to

he chin, and arranged with careful carelessness. A common ikeness linked them. They had sallow, puffy faces, of the exture of dough-paste, and blue jowls and skin that was coarse and dull from the frequent application of grease-paint. They smoked large cigars, talked loudly, and remembered their finger-rings. The women were obese and blowsy, or gaunt and bloodless. They were an unclean tribe. An appurtenance of the bar was a billiard-saloon, where wary, red-faced hawks in their shirt-sleeves were playing "pyramids" to the derision of potential pigeons. The auditorium was visible through an open door; the bar itself aimed at privacy.

The chairman drank his brandy at a gulp, and returned hastily to his seat of office.

"I can't miss 'The Gorgonzola Cheese,'" he explained, apologetically.

"The Gorgonzola Cheese" was mouthed by the wizened youth, and sung by the audience. Drunken boyhood, sodden manhood, anæmic womanhood, foul age, howled and shrieked it from the gallery; men in greasy evening dress and debauched women hummed it in the stalls; a crowd of mad youths rioted through the carpet lanes between the seats, and cried it forth to an accompaniment of wild dancing, waiters pursuing them with timid expostulation.

"Again!" mouthed the atomy upon the stage. And again the foul chorus rent the air to the tinselled roof-rafters.

> "Ow, thet Gorginzoler cheese,
> Must ha' bin un'ealfy, I ser-pose!
> Fer the ole Tawm cat fell a corp upon the mat
> When the nif rose up 'is nose!
> You mer tork abart the odour o' the cracklin'
> on the pork;
> Nuffink cud ha' bin so strong
> Es the terrorble effluvier thet filled ar 'ouse
> When the Gorginzoler cheese went wrong!"

"It's very funny, isn't it?" said John Coldershaw to a passing acquaintance.

"A clever song, my boy, a clever song!" replied the acquaintance. "Come and have a drink?"

John went again to the bar, and mingled with the crowd there.

Presently Hetty came down and claimed him. She wore

a shawl and bonnet now, and a white veil studded with spots of gold. She had not troubled to wash her face. She hit one man in the back and knocked off another's hat.

"All right, you pretty bitch!" said one of the men, laughing.

"Get me a drop of gin, Jack," said Hetty. "And try and look as if it was for yourself."

She drank the gin thirstily, and they departed from the music-hall. John hailed a cab outside, handed Hetty in whilst a half-clad urchin held his naked arm across the muddy wheel, and gave the driver direction: "To the *Badgers*, Soho."

"Gimme a copper, sir, gimme a copper," whined the urchin.

The cabman cut at him with his whip. He fell into the road with a shrill cry.

"Poor little devil!" said Hetty, and threw out a shilling.

John laughed, and she blushed under her paint for her gentle impulse.

The Badgers was a midnight club held in rooms over a dingy public-house. The cabman smirked wryly as he pulled up his horse outside it. John caught the smirk, paid the fellow his legal fare, and cursed him for a saucy hound. He took Hetty on his arm and went into the house. On the threshold he was challenged by a broken-nosed bully, holding keen ward.

The premises of the club consisted of two large rooms on the first storey. The rooms were of equal size, but alike in no other particular. One was luxuriously appointed; delicate tapestry swept the walls from painted ceiling to gaudy floor; silk cushions softened the rigour of hard oak. There were only four persons in this room, and they were huddled together in a dim corner gambling with cards. At the entry of John and Hetty they half rose, turning fearful faces to the door, and covering their gold with greedy fingers. Recognising the intruders they subsided again into their seats, and the haggard play continued.

John and Hetty passed on to the second room, from whence came a hollow, spasmodic murmur of voices. A group of palms masked the door. They went their cautious way between the heavy, earthenware pots, John

holding aside the broad, long leaves whilst Hetty passed through.

Thus, by way of a curtained portal, they entered the second room. This was a bare, unadorned apartment, lighted from above by myriad gas-jets. In the centre of the floor, a clear space, measuring some sixty square yards, was staked off with ropes. From the ropes' edge to the walls ranged tier on tier of a rude gallery, thick with men and women. In the centre of the open space a tangled medley of straining limbs twisted and writhed.

Hetty clapped her hands.

"A prize-fight!" she cried.

A hissing whisper arose from the crowd, and fifty brutal faces glared at her.

A burly ruffian in shirt-sleeves rose from his crouching posture in a corner just outside the open space, and said, with soft emphasis:

"On what you see pass no remarks, please."

Hetty blushed for her outrage of the canons of sport, and mounted to the topmost tier of the gallery, John following her.

There they found a seat from which the contest could be seen without discomfort.

The men had separated. They were both of similar build; misshapen, undersized, with heavy-jawed heads, huge, hunched shoulders, and short, bowed legs. Their hands were red with blood; blood was smeared on their panting breasts and trickled from their hair in heavy blots upon their shoulders. They closed again, sobbing, coughing, gasping, striking blindly, the thick squelch of their bursting flesh and the hollow grating of their nailed shoes on the boards pricking the hissing silence with points of sickening sound. A capering youth rippled with mirth at Hetty's elbow. Dishonoured hoar-locks trembled and shrivelled hands went rolling, rolling in a vertigo of bestial frenzy. A woman stood up and made as if to push on to victory with her ringed hands the lagging hero of her choice.

It was over. Roars rent the air. One poor, stunned wretch lay unregarded on the floor, nosing a pool of his own evil blood; the other, vomiting, weeping from broken eyelids, aiming fibreless blows at delirium-peopled air, reeled, fainting, in the arms of applauding partisans. The

crowd scrambled down from the galleries, overset the palms masking the door, and burst upon the startled gamblers in the first room with wild outcries of song and random mirth.

A buxom woman started from the serried, swaying ranks and threw herself into a dancing posture, knuckles on hips, head back, one foot advanced. A tiny Italian, green of face, with his rusty black hair hanging in clots about his ears, went to a piano in a corner and began to play. The woman danced. She danced not with feet and legs alone but with hands, arms, eyes, mouth, and body. And as she danced she sang. Her voice was soft and small; a chirping, laughing voice. There were no words in her song; it was but a tiny crooning of the music of the piano. She threw off her hat and trailed her white shawl on the floor. Her hair, becoming loosed from its fastenings, fell on her shoulders in snaky masses, throwing a black tress, sometimes, across her flushing face. She danced as if her limbs had never learned to move in soberer fashion. She danced with a great appearance of gravity save at intervals when, meeting a merry eye in the crowd, she gave a laughing, bursting cry and raised the trailing shawl and whirled it wildly in flying spirals, about her tempestuous head.

The infection of her example spread. A second woman, tall, almost gaunt, with yellow-brown hair arranged in fluffy curls close down on her eyes and a hungry pallid face in which lips and nostrils gleamed red, almost like wounds, faced her in the mad measure, teeth glistening, eyes glancing, breasts heaving. For a brief space they two had the floor. Then, in an instant, a score of twisting, twirling, panting, crooning women were dancing on the soft carpet.

"I must, too!" said Hetty.

John laughed and would have restrained her, but she broke away from him and flew, bobbing jerkily, into the dance. The men were driven to the wall. Everywhere were tossing limbs, flying hair, waving arms, shining pink faces and gleaming eyes, whisking feet under billowing draperies, a medley of warm tints with fluttering lace for high white relief. The crash and tinkle of the piano rose fitfully above the murmurous crooning of the women, the swish of their flying skirts, and the sob-sob of their labouring breath. Rucks furrowed the carpets; shawls slipped from careless shoulders, hampering the giddy feet of the

dancers; there were staggering rushes, and, finally, a fall.

On the instant there was a tense pause. The music of the piano continued.

The fallen woman raised herself slowly, touched her hair with her hand, and uttered a shrill curse. The men shrugged their shoulders, exchanging glances, and filtered through the crowd toward the angry, rumpled woman. One laughed outright and was struck down from behind, staggering forward through an opening lane of humans till he fell crashing on his head against the wall. Instantly there was a fierce outcry and a new madness. In all mankind there is a bestial lust of blood. The sight of the horrid contest lately over had quickened it in these men. They turned, each on his fellow, to rend and slay. The women flew to interpose their bodies between their lovers' blows with thin wailings and tearful entreaties. They were thrown down, spurned aside.

The music of the piano continued.

John stood aloof from the tumult. Hetty had sought him at the first outbreak. She was tugging his arm.

"Come away, Jack, come away!" she cried. "If you join in and get your face hurt I'll never look at you again."

He withdrew slowly. Near the door he encountered two men, wrestling fiercely. One, a youth, was striking frantically at the grey head of his antagonist with a broken decanter. His own hand was cut where it touched the jagged glass; blood spattered his white cuff.

"It's Underton!" said John, starting forward. "Dick, you fool, come off! Do you want to murder the old man?"

Dick turned his white face and his grip relaxed. He dropped the decanter on the floor. His victim escaped away among the women.

"Eh? What?" panted Dick, huskily.

"You're drunk!" said John.

Dick stood with his head thrust forward, his arms dangling limply at his sides.

"Yes," he said; "I was. Where are you going, Jack? Let me come with you. I want to get out of this."

Hetty thrust herself forward.

"You're not going to take Jack away from me," she said. "You must get out of it alone."

"Ah, yes, alone!" echoed Dick.

He smiled faintly and sat down, wiping his wet brow.

"Go on, go on!" he said, waving his hand.

John said: "See you again soon. Come on, Hetty," and went out.

He paused on the threshold and looked back. A few determined men had quelled the tumult. The combatants were reaping for their valour a harvest of women's tears and women's kisses.

The green-faced Italian still sat at the piano, playing nimbly with senses blind to all things save the music of his creation.

Hetty and John went on to the house of the poet Wyber. John was somewhat loth to go, but Hetty insisted.

"You have never been," she said; "you don't know what it is."

"He's such a bore," protested John; "and he's mad."

"I want to be mad, too, to-night," said Hetty. "You must come."

There was no appeal. John went.

Wyber lived in a small house near the river. He was a rich man and lavishly hospitable.

He met them in the hall.

"You are the last of all my guests and yet the first," he said. "We are eleven in all. Five of us are women, four of us are men, and one is a cheesemonger."

John looked askance.

"Mr. Wyber is sexless," explained Hetty.

"Yes," smiled Wyber, "I am a genius. But do you know the cheesemonger, Mr. Coldershaw? I think it is Coldershaw.

"No," said John; "I'm afraid I don't."

"Ah!" murmured Wyber; "he is a man to know. He is so primitive, quite barbaric. He was born on a desert island—I fancy it is an island—called The Suburbs. And he has ambitions. Come and know him."

He led them upstairs to a small room in the rear of the house. Every piece of furniture in the room was coloured grey. The curtains and carpet were grey. Censers of grey metal, in which burned sweet-smelling spices, swung from the grey ceiling. Mr. Wyber himself was attired in a grey dressing-gown and grey silk shoes.

The guests were distributed about the room, conversing together and drinking wine from silver cups. They

bestowed the merest glance on the new-comers and gave them no further heed. Hetty sat down on a low sofa and John sat beside her. Mr. Wyber hovered over them, smiling, then wandered away to mingle with his other guests.

A young man, with a heavy, red face, spoke:

"Have you ever felt, sir," he said, addressing Wyber, "that there is such a thing as soundless song?"

Mr. Wyber walked away from the speaker and stooped to whisper in Hetty's ear: "It is the cheesemonger."

Then he replied:

"Yes, yes; I always feel like that after cheese."

The young man grinned and subsided.

Mr. Wyber brought a great goblet of wine to Hetty.

"It is for you both," he said. "Your lips must make it sweet for one another."

Hetty laughed, put her mouth to the wine, and passed it to John. He drained it to the lees. The poet filled it again.

"Drink of the sweet poisonous waters of life as you drink of that sweet, poisonous wine," he said. "It is the best way. There are men who *eat* life, *chew* it. Bah! Life is not a meal, a sober repast; it is a goblet of effervescence to be drained at a gulp."

The wine was stronger than John had thought. His senses went abroad. He began to laugh and talk, even to sing.

"Kiss me, Hetty, kiss me!" he said, turning to her and crushing her in his arms. "More wine, more wine!" he cried, releasing her. Wyber smiled and handed him the great goblet. He drank again.

"Wine is like wanton fire, embracing and destroying, touching and dissolving into froth what had been cold, hard metal!" murmured Wyber. "Drink again, musk-rose youth, drink, drink! And you," turning on his other guests, "drink too. Purge out chastity, bedew the flowers of passion! Drink, drink!"

The wine passed.

"I will sing," said the poet.

He fetched a silver-gilt guitar and touched the strings and sang.

His voice was soft and clear as the limpid waters of a nestling, rock-bound lake. He sang with closed eyes. As

he sang his face mirrored the ghost of his dead youth. The grossness almost went from him. His lips hardened and tightened. His purple cheeks became blue-white. He sang very sweetly. This was his song:

"Light, light! Waters of light!
Light that cometh from the East!
Light of the hidden stars;
Light of the waning moon;
Light white with travail of day!

"Light, light! Warm wine of light!
Light that cometh from the South.
Light of the parchèd noon.
Light of fire! light of love!
Life-breathing light! Light of wine!

"Light, light! Ashes of light!
Light that cometh from the West.
Light grey with tears and pain;
Light red with blood of day!
Light wan with passion spent!
Light, fleeing darkness and death!"

The cheesemonger started from a brooding rhapsody.

"Oh, poesy, poesy!" he cried.

"Oh, cheese, cheese!" murmured Wyber.

A candle flared and the wax guttered down and dripped upon the carpet. Wyber snuffed it out. Eleven other candle-jets still remained. He snuffed them out, too.

The censers burned with a ghostly blue flame, leaping and flickering. The grey walls absorbed their light and scattered it again. The room was filled with ghosts on the instant. Nothing seemed palpable. A bubble of spilt wine on a leaden tray burned with a fierce red sparkle. The goblets flashed forth silver stars.

Wyber stood under a censer, with spread arms, in a circle of pale light.

"Sweet God of Evil, Spawn of Heaven, Ruler of crimson darkness, King of Hell!" he said, through his gleaming teeth. "We, thy humble votaries, do pray——"

There was a sudden distant outbreak of inchoate sound, hoarse shoutings, a crashing and rumbling.

"Hark!" cried the cheesemonger.

The sounds continued.

A woman started up and screamed:

"Light, light!"

Wyber stood, grinning silently, under the swinging censer.

"O, you tiny little fools!" he said, very softly and sweetly. "It is only a fire-engine in the street."

Trembling hands lighted the candles.

"Let us go," said Hetty to John.

"Yes, yes," answered John, rising from her arms with palsied limbs and chattering teeth. "I feel sick. I am burning."

Wyber turned his back on them all and strode from the room. They cried out to him to return, but he did not answer.

"Let us go," the woman who had screamed implored her shaken lover. "I am full of fears. It is too awful."

Hetty drew John towards the door, and together they descended the stairs. The hall was in darkness. They lifted the heavy latch and passed into the street.

It was the hour of dawn. The sky was grey with scudding clouds; a thin rain was falling; the air was keen.

A drowsy cabman in a gleaming oilskin saw them from his perch far down the street, and whipped up his smoking horse.

"Mornin', miss," he said, recognising Hetty. "Home?"

She nodded, and they climbed into the vehicle.

The cabman clucked in his cheek, and tickled the horse's ear with the lash of his whip.

"Pore beast!" he said.

END OF FIRST STAGE

Second Stage

The Sorry Substance

CHAPTERS IX–XVII

CHAPTER IX

EVA confronted the doctor at the foot of the stairs and asked him:

"Well?"

He scanned her face closely.

"I see," she said, meeting his gaze. "You need not have been afraid to tell me. Will it be soon?"

"Yes, very soon."

He went out with a great wonder struggling at the back of his admiration for her. She returned to her father. He had fallen asleep. She stood watching his haggard face with a pity in her eyes that was almost motherly.

She went back into the front room and took up her work at the point where she had laid it down. She did not cry. The time was past for that. Her lips were firm, her eyes clear. It would have saved her much toil to use the sewing-machine, and she was worn with overwork. But the sewing-machine was noisy, and her father must sleep.

He was very ill; she knew now that he was dying. All night he had raved in delirium, and she had watched and tended him. In the grey, rain-riddled morning she had gone out to fetch a doctor. He had been long in coming. His face had confirmed her fears. She was resigned.

The long hours of the afternoon wound their weary coil about her heart. She was sick with hunger and unrest. There were moments when she fell asleep with the flashing needle idle in her hand. Once she rose and cut a crust from a stale loaf in the cupboard and ate it greedily. She was tempted to cut another crust, but did not. As the light faded she bent her eyes closer to her work.

Late in the evening there came a hamper for her father containing a pair of trussed fowls, a ham, some pots of jelly, two packets of desiccated soup, a cake, and a bottle of wine. She searched among the straw for some word or

message. There was none. Her heart swelled with emotion, fluttering her gentle bosom.

She stole into her father's room. He still slept soundly. She went back and lit the lamp and continued her work. At last, it was finished. She packed it neatly in a great flat cardboard box, and donned her shawl and bonnet. The rain still splashed on the window. She took the great box under her arm and stole downstairs. The door of her landlady's parlour was open. She could see a group of chubby-cheeked children basking on the hearthrug in the glow of a bright fire. One tiny maiden rose and toddled unsteadily towards her, holding up a flushed face for a kiss.

Eva took the child in her arms and asked her:

"Where is your mamma?"

A spruce, sleek matron bustled out from the little kitchen at the rear-end of the passage.

"Was you asking for me?" she inquired.

"Yes. May your eldest girl sit upstairs with my father? I have to take some work home."

"Is he ill, then?"

"Yes, very ill."

"I'm sorry to hear that, very sorry." She beckoned to the tallest girl of the group before the fire. "Jenny, go upstairs," she said. "Is Mr. 'Ardrop asleep?" she asked Eva.

"Yes. I want you, Jenny, to run down and tell your mother if he wakes up. You don't mind?" turning to the woman.

"As if I should, my dear! No, certainly not. I'm ironing some clo'es now, but as soon as I'm done—I sha'n't be long—I'll go up and sit with him myself. I'm very sorry for you, and if there's anythink else I can do I hope you'll let me do it."

Eva thanked her and shook her head.

"Any cooking, now, you want done?" asked the woman. "I've got a nice fire all burning to waste. Say the word and it's at your disposal. A hamper come jest now, didn't it, with a fowl's leg a-sticking out. Could I cook the fowl for you?"

"It would be a great kindness."

"Lor' bless my heart! how you do go on. There's nothink in that. I'll run up myself and fetch it down."

She mounted three stairs and paused. "You're never going out in all this pouring rain without a' umbrella?" she cried, suddenly.

Eva hung her head and blushed.

The woman surveyed her from thin, worn boots to insufficient shawl.

"Give Miss 'Ardrop my umbrella, Jenny," she said. "It's in the back parlour—in the corner to the left of the fireplace."

Eva thanked her again and took the umbrella and went out.

It still rained hard. The uneven pavement gleamed with great puddles. A fierce wind was blowing from the east.

Eva stepped out bravely, bowing her slim figure to the storm. Her destination, the house of a very famous court dressmaker, was two miles distant, in the fashionable west-end. She walked briskly, for the night was cold and her clothes were worn to meagre thinness. But the box with its gorgeous contents was very heavy and tried her strength sorely. The damp air struck into her bosom with an icy chill. She was weary with walking ere she reached the end of the long street in which she existed. She paused at the corner to rest. Omnibuses were passing and repassing; she watched them wistfully. No; she must walk. The wind buffeted her, almost wresting from her weak, aching fingers, sore with needle pricks, the great, flat box and heavy umbrella. Hurrying wayfarers jostled and hustled her. Once she was shoved aside into the flooded gutter, and the water trickled in through her broken boots, drenching her feet to the ankles. She resumed her way, hugging the gas-lit shop-fronts for warmth and shelter. The water squelched in her boots at every step. Her darned stockings galled and chafed her wet feet till it seemed to her that they sweated blood. Once a burly old gentleman, self-absorbed in peevish misery, thrust her aside so violently that she fell, the great box striking up her arm and bruising her bosom. A young man helped her to rise. She had to wrest herself free of his embrace, and then he thrust his laughing face into hers with a look that was a desecration of the white temple of her soul.

The great court dressmaker censured her for being late

and commented severely on her dishevelled, bedraggled attire. She did this in the presence of the hall porter and a grinning page, for she was a lady with a large retinue of menials.

"I must insist," she said, "on your presenting a more respectable appearance when you bring home work. Positively you are a discredit to the establishment."

Eva mumbled a feeble apology, and asked if she could take any fresh work away with her.

The great lady, her employer, did not know; but Eva might wait if she liked.

Eva sat down on a stiff-backed chair in the bleak hall and the great lady swept upstairs. The porter remarked that it was a dreffful evening, and asked, producing a surreptitious pewter-pot from underneath his chair, would Eva like a drop of beer? She did not answer him, having fallen asleep with her wet head crushed against the wall. After an interval of an hour the great lady, who had many aristocratic preoccupations, sent down word by the page that there was nothing for the young person to wait for and she need not call again. The porter shook Eva into wakefulness, bade the page deliver his message, and dismissed her with considerable hauteur.

She stumbled out into the cold street, half dazed with drowsiness, and started to walk back. The wind and rain soon restored her to full consciousness. She ached with cold and weariness. Her lagging steps were slow and feeble. It was a terrible journey. Happily, she was relieved of the heavier part of her burden. The great lady had been kinder than she knew.

To beguile the way Eva recited, under her breath, fragments of classic poetry.

On the threshold of her poor home a deadly faintness assailed her. She clenched her jaws and overcame the weakness. The house was very quiet. She closed the street-door and crawled feebly upstairs. There was a crowd of women in the front room. She looked at them and what she saw in their faces made her cry out in sudden, awful fear. They would have barred her path but she put them aside with a gesture, and went in to mourn alone over the dead body of her father.

CHAPTER X

Poor Isaac Hardrop with his incomprehensible Past, Present, and Future, was dead. His body lay stiff and cold with the feeble vigour gone out of it. He had been a man of mirth, careful not to take himself too seriously. But Death has no sense of humour ; and garnered him in with the rest. There was an element of the incongruous in the sudden visitation ; perhaps that was why the corpse of the dead man smiled. He had acquired learning, refined his perceptions, and cultivated his wit, till he might well have sloughed the animal of him for ever and lived the higher life. He, himself, had troubled to remember this only when he lacked food for laughter. He had taken Life as a huge joke ; but Death had taken him seriously.

His child mourned him in solitude with her warm lips on his cold lips, with her living, loving heart throbbing on his fleshless bosom. She did not understand her own sorrow. She marvelled that no tempest of grief shook her ; that she could hear and heed the chatter in the adjoining room, could feel the hot throbbing of her wet, raw feet, and be tickled when a tress of hair strayed across her ear. She felt empty of all sensation, yet keenly alive to the sordid realities bounding her existence. A great terror of herself assailed her. O, she was heartless, heartless !

She murmured into the dead ear :

"But I did love you, dear old dad, didn't I !"

She was tired. All this fierce life was hardly worth while, she thought. It were better to rest, even as he was resting. She closed her eyes and fell asleep and dreamed. And her dreams happened in a mist of blood. But she did not care, for she knew she must awake. And, beyond, there was her father, unchanged in essence though bodied in new substance. She stretched toward him across the shadow with a little cry that showed her the bed and the corpse again and brought back those voices in the ad-

joining room and all the hard realities she would fain escape.

"But I did love you, dear old dad, didn't I?" she murmured again into the dead ear. "And, perhaps, I shall be sorry soon, when I am not so tired and my feet are not aching, aching——"

The women raised her up, and bore away the corpse, and stretched her in its place. She lay very still, smiling up at them with unseeing eyes, entreating them with aimless words to be kind and tender with her because she was tired. They stripped off the thin, broken boots and the old, darned stockings and wiped the poor bruised, blistered feet. They took away her wet garments and replaced them with clean, warm, white linen, that she could snuggle up in, cosily. They chafed her little, blue-cold hands, touching the needle-pricked fingers very tenderly, and combed out her clotted hair in a glorious golden aureola upon the pillow. They tried to make her eat, but she could not. She smiled and recited fragments of classic poetry, and did not understand. Her cheeks were pink; her blue eyes gleamed like stars; sometimes, she knit her brows in a tiny pucker of pain, and the lips that smiled so bravely up at them were white.

She fell asleep, and they went away to prepare the dead man for his coffin. They stripped him of his patched nightgown and flannels, and washed his naked body over a steaming tub. He was freshly arrayed in a laced shroud and stretched upon Eva's tacking-board; and a sheet was thrown over him. The ghastly outline of his face showed clear under the sheet. They left one grey cluster of toes uncovered; and did not notice it because they were tired after their ministrations, and the landlady's eldest was arrived with a bottle.

The rain still thrashed the windows, and dripped, dripped, dripped unceasingly from waterspout and eave. The women gathered round the fire, and sipped in a spirit of philosophy with their gin. They became mournfully reminiscent, pawing the hot air and shaking their heads. Their shadows danced in mockery on the yellow walls, and the dead man smiled under the sheet.

Eva lay upon the bed with wide eyes, listening and staring, and wondering why she was not sorry.

"But I did love you, dear old dad, didn't I?"

The candle on the chest of drawers changed suddenly into a lean little man in a long white robe, with a pale, hollow-eyed face under a red nightcap, and came and danced on her pillow, poking golden spears into her eyes.

She fell asleep, and in a moment it was day. She was racing the tide on a grey shore, and the sun was shining. Out upon the sky-line there were the white sails of flying ships. She was very happy and careless, and racing the tide was fun. She ran till she was tired, and then she climbed a great wall of red rock and came to a small white house perched high up, near the clouds, where there was always wind and the earth was as round as possible. She went in under a green porch, and her father met her on the stairs and took her to a room where her mother was. And her mother was dead. She was too little to care or know about it, but she was frightened, and when her father cried, very quietly, she cried too. And later, in the pale evening, when she wandered down to the sea again it was all changed, and there was no refuge from her dead mother anywhere. Her father followed her and met her, weeping her way homeward, and he laughed at her tears, and told her that it was all a game and they would go to London, where the game was started and the people played it always. And they came away in a train with dark green cushions in it, all speckled with light green spots, that rattled and made her head ache till she fell asleep, to awake in a terrible great dark forest of houses where the sky was always carpeted with clouds and the sunshine warmed the world in patches. She was glad to know all about the sea and the grey sand and the red wall of rock with the white house on the top of it, because it was pleasant and sweet and had really happened, in a time, a very long way back, just on the edge of memory; but the forest of houses and all that, though they had happened too, were not worth dreaming about. So she woke up.

And the rain was thrashing the windows, and the ashes of the fire were dancing on the hearth.

An old woman was heaped up in a chair beside her bed. She was snoring, and her nose was all crumpled up in her fist. Eva remembered her as a Mrs. Polly Weed, who drank and lived in a wet cellar downstairs, and had no friends, only two daughters who emptied pails of dirty

water on her from first-floor windows when she called on them. The door between the rooms stood open, and the light of the candle on the chest of drawers extended to Eva's tacking-board, whereon lay the corpse of her father dimly visible in outline under the sheet. Eva wanted to touch the corpse. She pushed down the bedclothes and dropped her feet on the floor. It was very cold. A shiver convulsed her. She stole past the sleeping woman into the room where the dead man lay. A lamp in the street threw a patch of light on the blind. There was a smoulder of red in the dying fire. Familiar things wore an unaccustomed aspect. For a space she stood idly regarding her surroundings. Then she put forth a trembling hand and pulled back the edge of the sheet. The shining, dead face smiled up at her and she recoiled. She was afraid of the cold, stiff thing.

She replaced the white covering. Her hand touched the skin of the face. It was cold and hard. She shuddered and started to return to her bed, a great way off. She fell across it with her arms extended, and lay quite still for a space. She was so tired. Presently she stirred to cover up her cold nakedness with the comfortable coverlet. It was a long, weary proceeding, but she was snug at last and purring in the warmth. . . . What was that an old, testy tutor had told her long ago? The world revolves on its axis once in every twenty-four seconds. It was quite true. She could see the walls jerking round now.

Mrs. Polly Weed gasped in her sleep. Perhaps she was dreaming of the dirty water her daughters had thrown over her? How that ridiculous noise shook the silence! Eva could see the circles of sound widening, widening . . . . They rippled over the dead man like water, and then it was quiet again. How terribly quiet it was! A horror of the infinite stillness overcame her, and she started up with a shriek. Mrs. Polly Weed awoke in a fluster, came to the bedside, and soothed her with a gnarled hand.

"There, there, my dear!" she murmured.

Eva clung to the gnarled hand, and it turned into a black, broken spar, on which she floated out into the wide, untravelled sea.

The doctor who had attended the dead man shook his head over Eva. She was very, very ill. Still, she was

young; there was yet hope. He listened to her ravings and the wonder at the back of his admiration grew.

"I did love you, dear old dad, didn't I? I am not wicked. Perhaps the sorrow will come. I was tired, and there was nothing to be sorry with. All those things inside me that tick like a clock were buzzing, buzzing, buzzing, till I could not hear what my heart said."

They cut away her soft, yellow hair, and the doctor did an unprofessional thing with some of it. He came very often, and every time her voice was strained to harsher raucousness; every time her eyes were bigger and her teeth gleamed whiter between her shrivelled lips.

Her father was shovelled away under the earth and she did not know. She was wandering with his living spirit through the forest of houses at the moment when the first dry clod of mould fell upon his coffin.

No one was allowed admittance to her presence save the doctor and Mrs. Polly Weed, her nurse.

Mrs. Sprunt was with difficulty kept out of the sickroom. Mr. Sprunt sniffed in the passage, and said that was the wust o' sellin' onions. Once he waylaid the doctor.

"I was a pal of her father's," he explained. "We used to mind one another's barrers."

The doctor nodded. There was a pause.

"Now you're a regular clever young feller, I should reckon," Mr. Sprunt said, presently. "If it is posserble to cure any one I should think you could cure 'em. You've got what I calls a interlectoral face, you have. My line's caustermongering—the wegibubble, chiefly—but I'm a bit of a face-reader too. And I've sized you up."

The doctor was in a hurry. He frowned with impatience.

"Yes, yes," he said.

"Miss Eva, now," said Sprunt. "You can cure her, eh?"

"I am doing my best."

"And you're going to cure her."

"I hope so."

"But you can cure her if you like, can't yer?"

"She is very ill. No man can do more than I have done. I cannot say if she will recover."

"Yus, yus, you can," said Sprunt. "You must say so. We're all so set on it."

He slipped a sovereign into the doctor's hand.

"Say it now," he said. "Say she'll recover. I don't care much meself. It's the missis."

"Take back your money and give me your hand instead," said the doctor. "You may be sure I will continue to do my best. And by God's help——"

"Don't you go putting too much trust in them outsiders, sir," said Sprunt. "God's a good 'co,' but there's nuffink like a little knowledge of medicine for diseases. It beats all manner of trust in Scripter. And don't let her run short of physic. If it's pints let her have it, if it's gallons let her have it. There's plenty of money behind her to pay for all and more."

There were other inquirers, the humble recipients of Eva's smiles and kind words in healthier days; mothers whose children she had caught up and kissed in the streets, clumsy young men for whom she had made, by her beauty, hazy impossible ideals.

A pursy old gentleman in a white waistcoat called and was very inquisitive. He cross-examined the landlady and pored long over some old portraits of Mr. Isaac Hardrop and Eva in the good woman's album. When he went away, he left a card on which was printed "Mr. Henson Cleogh, 104 Lincoln's Inn Fields." He called a second time to say that any—ah—funds which might be required to—ah—further Miss Hardrop's restoration to complete health would be—ah—forthcoming on application to him at the address stated. He left a second card in case they should mislay the first one and departed in a cloud of mystery.

Then, a magnificent young man called. He, too, left a card. Mrs. Polly Weed stuck it in the frame of the looking-glass over the mantel. He called again, and again, many times. Once he brought a bouquet. And, always, he said with an air of clever helplessness, "if there *was* anything I *could* do." But there was not.

The name on his card was "John Coldershaw."

CHAPTER XI

THE summer was past its meridian and the August days were hard put to it to squeeze enough of sullen heat into their dwindling hours, when, one morning, Eva was granted permission of the doctor to rise from her bed of sickness and sit for an hour in the little front room. A week before, Mr. Sprunt had brought round a great arm-chair, covered with gaudy chintz, for her to sit in; and Mrs. Sprunt had sat in it instead, and had cried in an honest, unashamed way for twenty minutes by the clock at sight of her poor, restored darling. It was all very beautiful, and Eva was filled with a feeling of quiet happiness that she did not care to analyse. She lay, with Mrs. Polly Weed holding her fluttering hand, watching the sparrows through her bedroom window as they went about their stormy business of life and laughing at the humour of it all. One day a great bunch of unseasonable roses came for her, and Mrs. Polly Weed told her that they were from "him," showing Eva a fly-spotted card bearing the name of John Coldershaw. Eva slipped the card under her pillow when she thought the eyes of Mrs. Polly Weed were off her and took little heed of the sparrows from that time forward. She begged a piece of paper and a pencil and tried to sketch the flowers, but her hand had lost its pristine cunning and she could do no more than tire herself vainly. After that, she was changed. Every knock at the street-door below mantled the blood in her wan cheeks. Once she heard his voice in deep altercation with the voluble landlady and it made her tremble. She had only seen him twice, yet his face was her clearest memory. Mrs. Polly Weed snorted. At the root of her affection for her gentle charge a bitter undergrowth of jealousy was springing up. Mrs. Sprunt and similar inquirers were honourable rivals whom she respected, but this shadowy John Coldershaw stirred her spleen.

The day that marked Eva's emergence from sickness into convalescence was a sunny day. Beams of light played among the flowers in the window. The air was soft and sweet with odours. A fat bee flew, booming, into the room and then battered the glass with his head in a vain endeavour to get out again.

"Poor, stupid old bee!" said Eva.

She had donned an old, flowered dressing-gown belonging to her dead mother. It was big and soft and billowy. Her faded little face, worn haggard with suffering, showed above it like a white flower. Mrs. Polly Weed sat crouched on a stool at her feet with mumbling jaws and rheumy, upturned eyes.

Thus they stayed for a short hour.

But soon Eva was able to move feebly from room to room again and to read her beloved books and take joy in her returning strength. The doctor still called, though he was the merest superfluity. He looked at her with strange sternness, she thought; yet he was ever gentle and his touch was deft as that of a woman. She liked him for his brown eyes and soft hand, though he was awkward, too, and stammered woefully. He liked her because he was a man first and a doctor afterwards.

And it was all beautiful. And the days came up in tumultuous succession to whelm time, and the sunbeams played with the flowers, and the fat bees boomed.

One day a pursy old gentleman laboured up the splintering stairs and panted at Eva across the room. He held a silk hat in his hand, and his belly showed round under his white waistcoat. His head was bald over his forehead, and his eyebrows were rags of grey hair. But he was a very human old gentleman, and had fatherly blue eyes.

He bowed.

"I am Mr. Henson Cleogh."

Eva fingered the card Mrs. Polly Weed had handed to her on the announcement of his name.

"Sit down, please," she said.

He sat down as if he enjoyed doing it, and mopped his face.

"I am glad to see that you are recovering from your late illness," he said.

"Thank you," said Eva.

"I have called several times to inquire after you. I

was legal adviser to your late grandfather, Sir Isaac Hardrop."

Eva stared.

"Is it possible that your father never mentioned your grandfather to you?"

"He never did."

"He was an only child, too. But I believe there was some unfortunate disagreement. We have been endeavouring to trace you for nearly a year—ever since your grandfather's death, in short."

"How——?" murmured Eva.

"It is quite clear, my dear Miss Hardrop, quite clear. At first, however, there was no inconsiderable difficulty. Your father seemed to have taken great pains to hide himself. He was a proud man, doubtless?"

"A very proud man!"

"Ah! I was in despair. I had even employed detectives, but without success. One day, some time since, one of my clerks, an acquaintance of yours, I think—his name is Richard Underton——?"

Eva pondered. "I have never heard the name."

"Your illness may have helped you to forget him. He is an unassuming man. A good enough young fellow, but decidedly unassuming. He told me that he knew of you, and suggested that there might be some connection. He gave me your address. I called. You were ill. I instituted inquiries, with the result that I am quite positive your father was the son of my client. Your own position is less assured, as I have been unable to obtain a proof of your mother's marriage. But that, I have no doubt, can be established without much difficulty. Perhaps you may be able to help me? Maybe there are papers, and the certificate is among them. It was necessary to obtain your consent before making a search. These little legal formalities, you know."

He mopped his face again.

"But I am exciting you?"

"No, no," cried Eva, the blood leaping to her temples. "It is doing me good."

There was a knock.

"It is the doctor," said Eva.

Mr. Henson Cleogh coughed uneasily and shifted his chair.

The doctor came in and shook Eva's hand.

"What have you been doing to send your temperature up like this?" he asked, sternly.

"I have been making a little statement that may have excited Miss Hardrop somewhat," said Mr. Cleogh, smiling with an air of discomfiture.

"The devil you have!" said the doctor, fiercely. "I beg your pardon, but Miss Hardrop is my patient."

"And doctors are an unlimited monarchy," smiled Eva.

"I am sorry," said the lawyer. "I will go."

"Good-bye," said the doctor.

The lawyer hesitated. "May I ask one question?"

"No," said the doctor.

"Yes, yes, yes," said Eva. "Let him, please."

"Very well."

"It was just this," said Mr. Cleogh, grinning in triumph. "The deceased died intestate, and there are other claimants; but you, Miss Hardrop, are the only direct lineal descendant. Consequently, the estate has been thrown into Chancery. The matter presses for immediate settlement, or I would not trouble you with these dry details. But in the case of delay it is likely that further costs will be incurred, heavy costs. I want to avoid any possibility of this. If, Miss Hardrop, you will make a search for your mother's marriage certificate among any family papers in your possession it will assist me materially. That is all. I will come again to-morrow."

He held out his hand.

"Good-bye," said Eva.

"And now," said the doctor, when Mr. Cleogh had departed, "you will go to bed at once."

"I shall do nothing of the sort," said Eva. "I am going to search my mother's desk for that certificate."

"You will go to bed at once."

"Very well, then," said Eva. "Send me to bed, and when I'm there I'll toss about and wonder and worry and not go to sleep till I'm ill again, just to serve you out, you nasty, calm thing."

The doctor smiled sadly and withdrew his taboo. Mrs. Polly Weed brought the desk, and Eva started to search among its contents. She turned over queer little packets of seed, faded photographs, black flowers that fell to dust at a touch, letters written in pale, yellow ink, a few locks

of hair tied with ribbon, fragments of broken jewellery, a silk glove, some programmes of dances scrawled over with initials, the hundred and one small things that women write their histories with. Even the doctor was infected with Eva's excitement, and cried "What's that?" at intervals.

The certificate was found rolled up in a piece of pink silk.

Eva spread it out on her lap and read it through from beginning to end.

"You'll go to bed now," said the doctor.

"I never want to go to bed any more," said Eva. "It will be a waste of time now I'm rich."

"*Are* you rich?" he asked.

"How can you ask that," exclaimed Eva, opening her eyes wide, "when you, yourself, heard the old gentleman talk about estates and intestates, and all those opulent-sounding things? And Chancery, too, and claimants!"

She laughed.

The doctor went away in a mood of sadness.

"They're all alike, these women!" he reflected, grimly. "A little money throws them off their balance at once. I expect she'll crown her folly by going and marrying some black skunk of a brute of a man now."

"I don't believe you're a bit pleased at my good fortune, you dear, stupid old thing," said Eva to Mrs. Polly Weed. "If it was you I'd be dancing and doing all sorts of disgraceful things."

"Money can't buy happiness," Mrs. Polly Weed said.

"It's good to have though," said Eva, "and better to spend."

"That maybe as maybe."

"Now you're being oracular."

"I'm a woman as has seen a sight o' money and I know."

"But you saw it at a distance. Money at a distance is a mistake, I agree."

"I'm no dab at talk like you, Miss Eva."

"I know you're trying to make me feel ashamed of myself," said Eva, "and it's very unkind of you. Money *is* good. I think I ought to know: I have never had any. I love money, bless it. And I love it, not because of the good it can do, but because it *is* money. I could strike moral attitudes; I could talk the higher altruism till cock-

crow, if I liked ; but I won't, because that would be all a hollow falseness. And I want to be true."

"God bless me ! how you carry on !"

"That's what the ships do when there is a fair breeze. And money is the wind that fills the sails of life."

"Ah, ah ! Well, well !"

Eva laughed and began to pace the room. Her face was flushed. The hollow bosom of her dress stirred faintly. She snapped her fingers.

"I will have a beautiful house with beautiful things in it, beautiful books, beautiful pictures ! I will eat good food and wear fine clothes. I will give parties and make friends. I will——"

She stopped suddenly and covered her face with her hands.

"No, no," she breathed, huskily.

"What is it now, my dear ?" faltered Mrs. Polly Weed, tottering toward her, and laying a skinny hand on her sleeve.

Eva tore herself free and ran to her bedroom and locked herself in. Mrs. Polly Weed rattled the handle, distractedly, crying :

"What is it ? What is it ?"

"My father, my father !" wailed Eva. "O, I am so wicked. Not one tear. And he lying in the cold ground. O, my poor father ! I could laugh and be glad, and you lying in the cold ground, father. O, forgive me !

"Let me in, let me in !" clamoured Mrs. Weed.

"No, no. Go away. I'm not fit to be touched. O, my dear, dear father !"

"Won't you let your poor old Polly Weedlekins in ?"

"Go away, go away. All this weary while and not a tear. O God forgive me my wickedness. How could I, how could I ? If he had been alive ! It all belongs to him. I will build him a marble tomb."

"Let me in, let me in."

"No, no, no. Go away and leave me."

Mrs. Polly Weed danced in a frenzy. Eva fell upon the bed and sobbed out the grief pent up in her till she could weep no more. Then she went to the door and admitted the old woman.

"You can put me to sleep now, dear old thing," she said. "It's all over ; and it was an education."

In the morning she was herself again.

It had been arranged that she should go out that day. After what had happened on the previous evening Mrs. Weed doubted the wisdom of the proceeding, and suggested waiting till the doctor came. But Eva was insistent and peremptory.

They went out. And on the doorstep was Mr. John Coldershaw, his pink and white face beaming glad surprise over his stiff white collar at the sight of her. She gave him her hand. Mrs. Polly Weed snorted in high dudgeon.

It was all a misty unreality to Eva. She wanted to still the heavy throbbing of her heart with her hand, but dared not for very shame's sake. Mrs. Polly Weed's snorts punctuated the dream.

"So glad to see you about again," he said. "Is this the first time?"

"Yes."

"May I offer you my arm? I am afraid you have been very seriously ill."

"It is all over now," said Eva.

They were walking down the street. At every window there were eyes that clung to the hope of a smile from her. On the opposite pavement Mr. and Mrs. Sprunt stood gaping, aghast. But Eva saw no one, nothing. Even Mrs. Polly Weed was unregarded.

"It is a glorious day!" said John.

It was the most glorious day that ever climbed the edge of earth. There was no other day in Eva's calendar of glorious days but paled its ineffectual splendour before the radiant wonder of this morning. She was thrilled through with the simple joy of living.

A sudden thought stirred her.

"You sent me grapes and a hamper and flowers," she began.

"I?" he stammered.

"I have not thanked you for them. I have not had a chance, you know. I thank you now."

John gave her a sidelong glance, and bit his lips to punish them because they smiled.

"You're a getting tired, Miss Eva," said Polly Weed.

Eva laughed the idea to scorn.

"You'd better turn back," persisted the old woman.

"That is too ridiculous!" said Eva. "Tired! I don't think I shall ever be tired again."

They turned into a quiet square where there was no room for wheeled traffic and only idlers strayed. Grass grew between the uneven stones and in the centre of the space a great tree reared its head and spread its sheltering arms, as proudly as if every window had held a kingly spectator. They sat down on a bench in the shade and watched the warp and woof of sunshine on the grey flags and listened to the noisy twittering of the sparrows among the leaves overhead. A tinker had wheeled his ambulatory paraphernalia into the place and was eating his midday meal of bread and cheese and beer, to the distraction of a brood of derelict chickens hovering doubtfully on abnormally long legs a yard outside the shower of crumbs shed from his repast. Every flash of his white teeth revealed that he was as good-humoured a tinker as ever rasped a file, but the chicks were callow and had no experience of life or tinkers to go upon, so they fluttered their inadequate wings and bubbled distressfully, greatly desiring, greatly fearing. A group of children were being wild Indians in a corner, and over against the wall of one of the drab houses two slatternly gossips, nursing babes, were auditing a neighbour's account with Heaven. The sky was a stretch of purple gauze, cloudless, serene. The wind blew in lazy gusts. It was a warm, languorous wind, heavy with messages from the wider world beyond the city where imagination had no place and Heaven was scarcely higher than a strong man's upstretched hand.

Eva felt that, for her, life had exhausted its possibilities. John Coldershaw's eyes were filled with tears; it is so hard to suppress a long series of very muscular yawns. Mrs. Polly Weed crumpled her nose in her fist and fell asleep where she sat.

Little was said. Speech is, at best, but a gross form of expression. And John had nothing to say.

They returned by a circuitous route and Eva went straight to her bedroom. Mrs. Polly Weed found her before the mirror.

"Why did they cut off my hair?" asked Eva.

"'Cos ye was ill," replied the old woman.

"I wish they hadn't."

"You'd ha' bin dead else."

"I don't believe it. What good could the loss of my hair do me?"

"Little enough, I expect, as they've left your face."

Eva turned to the mirror again.

"No," she said, apostrophising it, "there's no consolation in you. Your imitation of me is too close to be flattering."

Mrs. Polly Weed rattled the fire-irons.

"What a clatter!" cried Eva. She turned and went over and put her hands on the old woman's shoulders.

"Now, tell me truly," she said, twisting her round, "am I what you would call pretty?"

There was a long pause.

"What d'ye think o' yourself?" asked Mrs. Polly Weed.

"I think I'm hideous, but then——"

"Ye may take it from me ye're hideous as——"

"I'm NOT!" cried Eva. "How dare you say such a thing!"

"There, there," said Mrs. Polly Weed. "Don't go giving away your sex like that."

"You only said it because—oh, because you're a dear old thing. The worst of it is it's too long to be worn short and not long enough to put up properly. I am talking about my hair, now."

"Don't 'pologise," said the old woman. "I like it."

Eva kissed her.

"I wasn't apologising," she said. "But you serve me right."

"He's a nasty, saucy monkey!" said Mrs. Polly Weed, under her breath. "An' I wish I didn't know it."

CHAPTER XII

ALL this time John Coldershaw had worn the thorny crown of duty. For three months he had been studying law in the dusty, musty office of Mr. Garth Wyse, a solicitor with whom his father had large dealings. Not once had he slept out of his home-bed or returned to roost later than one o'clock in the morning, and never more than half fuddled. He was not yet ripe enough for a "coach," having to go over a deal of old, forgotten ground; but, in a year at most, he said, he hoped to go in for his "final," and then his father was to buy him a share in Mr. Wyse's lucrative business. His parents were very jubilant, and John had no complaint to make on the score of his allowance.

At first, his mother, embittered by experience, flouted him with scorn and contumely, pouring on his hot endeavours the cold waters of irony. But as time sped and no further lapses from propriety followed his first initial outbreak, her heart softened toward him, and she, too, joined in heaping up praises on his head. If she had doubts of the issue of it all, she took pains to hide them away at the back of her consciousness where even she, herself, could hardly find them.

To temper his martyrdom somewhat, John read as little as possible and spent much of the time that he should have devoted to study in luncheon-bars and coffee-rooms. He had a small office to himself, and kept boxes of cigars in it and bottles of whisky and syphons of soda, and much light literature. His chair was comfortably padded, and by pushing it back he could reach his desk with his feet. Mr. Wyse was too busy and short-sighted to take any special interest in the young man whom he rarely saw; at intervals he asked him when he expected to occupy the woolsack, and did not wait for an answer. He had booked up in his diary, at a date a year hence: "Moot matter of

partnership, self and Simon Coldershaw's son," and was not in a hurry to anticipate what was obviously a natural law of sequence. At the beginning of the Long Vacation, early in August, he went away to Switzerland for his annual jaunt. John was then left entirely to his own devices.

In the Long Vacation lawyers become mere men, and develop high spirits. The meaner fry dot the sands of Margate, or dawdle about in hotels in Westmoreland waiting for the rain to stop ; their betters startle with kilts the Scots aborigines or scorch their noses in French watering-places ; while the aristocracy of them all, prosperous Q.C.'s and barristers, bland judges, official referees, proctors, chief clerks and masters of the High Court, and solicitors of standing, scatter to the remoter parts of the Continent of Europe, penetrating even to the Asiatic half of the Mediterranean. Their clerks, released from close surveillance, play "nap" and "shove 'apenny" in their masters' private rooms, and encourage itinerant musicians to stop and perform dolorously outside their office windows; managers whistle away the leaden hours from the depths of armchairs in inner sanctums sacred to more austere music, and office-boys wash luxuriously with senior partners' soap. It is a time of laughter and strolling out for drinks ; a gay, irresponsible time. John Coldershaw took full advantage of it.

He went very often to visit Eva. He sent her flowers and books, and accompanied her in her daily walks abroad. She was rapidly regaining health. Soon she was to go away to the sea-side.

"I shall be so sorry to part from you," she told John.

"But may I not come and see you while you are away?" he asked her. "You will give me your address ?"

She fingered her gown and did not answer him.

He left the house, smiling enigmatically, and went into the City to see Dick Underton.

"Here's a pretty thing," said Underton. "The Vacation three weeks old and Cleogh still in town. I give you my word I did quite an hour's work this morning. He's pottering about with that Hardrop case, you know. I wish he'd sling his hook. It's perfectly sickening !"

"How does the case stand ?"

"There's no doubt about her being the genuine party

now that the marriage-certificate has turned up. I wish I was her."

"I wish she was Hetty. I can't stand her puling, puking ways. There's no more 'go' in her than there is in——"

"Old Cleogh."

"Every day I'm round there now, and every day I get sicker and sicker. It isn't love sickness, either. I shall be glad when we are married and it's all over.'

"I'm sorrier for her than I am for you. You'll get the money and everything and she'll get nothing."

"She'll get me."

The two young men were sitting in the bar of a restaurant. John crushed the lemon-peel in his whisky and laughed splenetically.

"It's a comfortable sum though," he remarked. "Ten thousand pounds, not but what it might just as easily have been a hundred thousand."

"The old baronet was very poor—for a baronet, I mean, of course. *I* could very well do with a hundredth part of his money."

"Won't I make it fly!" cried John. "I reckon I deserve something for what I've had to put up with lately. Home every night at half-past twelve—no chance of a good booze —no Hetty—no nothing. It's awful! But it will do the mater a lot of good to be impressed for once with a due sense of my capacity for self-sacrifice. She said, this morning, she thought I was looking rather pale, and asked me why I didn't go away. I told her I wanted not to break away from my studies. She said I must not endanger my health. I expect she'll *insist* on my going away soon. It doesn't suit my humour to leave town just now: after all, rusticity is not so very charming; but next week the Eva girl goes away, and then I suppose I shall have to yield to the mater and go away, too. I can't afford to lose that ten thousand pounds after I've given up so much for it."

Dick said nothing; but his brow puckered and his lips curled. John drained his glass.

"Have another?" he asked.

"Thanks."

"Would you mind ordering it. I hate ordering things."

"I say, Jack," said Dick, presently.

"Well?"

"I'm awfully hard up."

"So am I."

"I've been so frightfully hit over this betting business.

"So have I."

"I wish to God I'd never started it."

"I rather wish I hadn't, either. After all, perhaps the excitement's worth the money, though."

"You can afford it better than I can."

"I don't know so much about that. I have more expensive tastes than you."

"I wish you'd lend me five pounds, Jack."

"My dear boy, I couldn't lend you five pence."

"I wish you would."

"Don't go on like a parrot. Who the devil do you think I am to give you five pounds?"

"I said 'lend.'"

"O, I know what that means."

Dick flushed with anger.

"Jack," he said, "I didn't deserve that. You've no right to insult me. I'd lend you five pounds quick enough if I had it, and I wouldn't stop to think whether you were able to pay me back or not."

"I have noticed that some people are very proud of certain follies," said John Coldershaw. "I didn't know you were one of those people. I'm sorry for you."

The tears started to Dick's eyes.

"Jack," he cried, tremulously, "I can't stand this from you. It's too damned unfriendly."

"It seems that friendship is merely an excuse to borrow money."

"You're hipped, you must be. This isn't you. I won't believe it. You couldn't say such things."

"Sit down and try to look as little like a fool as is compatible with the fact of your being one," said John Coldershaw, laughing. "Don't stand there snivelling like a great girl."

"Jack, will you shut up."

"Put your hands over your ears if you don't care to listen . . . . and I'll knock you down if you do! You know I never could stand sentiment and bosh."

"I thought you liked me. We have been friends. I'd do a lot for your sake."

"I'd stand by you in a row and hold your coat and all

that sort of thing, of course. But that's as far as my friendship for any man would take me. As for 'liking' and doing things for your sake and all that damned rot—— Phoo! it's only women who affect that sort of vice and idiotic milksops and yokels. I'm a man of the world. I've never pretended to have any particular affection for you or anyone. I'm the same John Coldershaw you've hitherto expressed your perfect satisfaction with, not changed a bit. If you're disillusioned, or whatever it is, you can go. *I* sha'n't cry at parting from you."

"I see what it is. You want to be rid of me."

"See what you like. See double—and at my expense; I don't mind. I've said nothing about severing the connection, but I'm not going to entreat the favour of your friendship, all the same."

There was a long pause.

"Jack," said Dick, at last, "you don't mean all that, do you? I know we pretend not to care about things and so on. But, after all, we are very fond of one another, eh? I'm aware that I'm making an idiot of myself. I always was a bit soft-hearted—call it 'soft-headed,' if you like. I'm afraid there's a lot of my dead mother in me. P'r'aps I'm half a woman, by accident. Still, I'm not ashamed to say——"

John Coldershaw started to his feet.

"O, go to the devil!" he cried. "I can't sit here while the barmaids laugh at you. I shall not lend you the five pounds, because I think it is a foolish thing to lend money to anyone. As for all the other rot . . . . well, I've forgotten it. You'd better forget it, too."

"I can't forget it, Jack."

"Come outside."

They left the restaurant and turned into Holborn. They reached the "Bars" and threaded the archway leading to Staple Inn. Here they sat down on the circular bench under the trees. All the time there had been silence, like a wall, between them.

"Well?" said John Coldershaw, smiling.

Underton prodded out one of the brown cobblestones with his stick and stooped to throw it away, aimlessly. The roar of traffic came to them, subdued and softened, like the far-off music of a storm-beaten sea.

"Well?" said John Coldershaw again.

"Leave me alone, Jack," said Underton. "I'm all upset.

"Phoo!"

Underton turned a blazing face to him.

"I've been a fool, I know," he said, "but you've no right to remind me of it. It's your fault. I've done it all because I wanted your friendship—your rotten friendship that breaks down at the first strain. O, I'm not afraid of you. I'm a better man than you. I wouldn't sneer at my mother, fool my father, betray a woman, or use a friend as you have done. I thought it was all a silly piece of bounce and emptiness. And so it is. But it's John Coldershaw, too."

"You'd better be careful. As yet, you only amuse me, and I don't mind because I can see that you are suffering. But I'm not a saint and I have a temper to lose."

"You're six inches taller than me and a stone or two heavier. But I should advise you not to lose that temper of yours, all the same. I'm not afraid of you. And if it came to fighting there'd be something to strengthen my fingers if once they touched your throat. I'd love to see your lying tongue come lolling out between your pretty teeth."

John Coldershaw looked at the fool and did not lose his temper to any demonstrative extent, though his eyes gleamed and he laughed unpleasantly.

"Go on, go on," he said.

Underton's rage had leaped all bounds. He rose and stood over John with livid, working lips and starting eyes. The few idlers in their vicinity strolled up and stood round. Underton turned to them.

"Look at him!" he cried, indicating John with a trembling hand. "Isn't he pretty! Don't you all wish you could flaunt a gold chain and wear fine clothes?"

He choked. John Coldershaw was very white. But he did not rise and go away. He pulled out a cigar and lighted it with an attempt at bravado that missed its effect rather badly.

"Look at him!" cried Underton again. "This is a man who called himself my friend, used me to help work out his own bad ends, and then threw me aside when I had done what he wanted—threw me aside as he now throws aside the cigar he feels too sick to smoke. This is

a man who sneers at his mother and father because they never had a chance to learn Latin and Greek, though it is with their money he plays the idle man about town. This is a man who lies and cheats his way through life, never working, living on the toil of others. This is a man who would betray a girl because she has some money and is fool enough to love him. This is a man who brags of his intrigues with third-rate actresses. This is a man who wasn't too proud to borrow half-crowns from me when I had them and he hadn't, but who never lends money because it is a foolish thing to do."

John Coldershaw rose and walked into Holborn with Underton at his heels vilifying him, and a crowd of ragged loafers running ahead to look into his face. He hailed a cab and climbed in. He shook his fist at Underton over the apron. The crowd groaned.

The vehicle started. John leaned back among the cushions with a black scowl darkening his brow and blacker fury seething in his heart. He was angry with a sense of loss. His proselyte had fallen away from allegiance; had dared to brand him with contempt in the public street. It was an event he had never contemplated. That the mild, watery, pusillanimous Dick Underton should cause such a cataclysm, confounded and bewildered him. He wanted to go back and beat out the fool's brains; but he wished he had lent him the money. He was greedy of power, and Dick Underton had been half his kingdom.

He was driven home and went straight to his bedroom. His mother followed him up the stairs and tapped at his door.

"Come in, come in," he cried. Everything was an exasperation and his voice rasped peevishly.

Mrs. Coldershaw looked at him with gentle concern in her eyes. She sat down beside him on the bed and took his hand in hers. He suffered her caresses as he would have suffered the caresses of a dog.

"You are ill, John," she said, with anxious solicitude. "You have been working too hard."

"O, I'm well enough," he replied.

"You're not. You must go away."

"If I go away it will break into my reading."

"If you don't go away it will break into your health. Let the books rest awhile."

"I'll stick to them for just another week. Then, if I don't feel any better—it is impossible to hide from you that I am a bit seedy, I see—I will go away to some quiet seaside place, and take my books with me."

There was a long pause.

"John," his mother said at last, "you don't know what a joy this alteration in you is to me. I feel it must be a dream, and I hope I sha'n't never wake up from it. I'm sure you must be happier, too, in your heart."

He said nothing.

"But I'm worrying you with my talk," said Mrs. Coldershaw, rising.

There came a knock at the door.

"May I come in? or is it a private intervoo, so to speak?" said the voice of Mr. Coldershaw.

He thrust in his head and followed it slowly.

"Well?" said his wife, tartly.

"I come up to give you this here letter which has jest arriv'," said he, addressing John.

John took the letter, glanced at the superscription and slipped it into his pocket. His mother looked at him with her keen eyes shrewdly contracted. She made no remark concerning the letter, but rose and went to the door.

"You'll want to be left alone now, I s'pose," she said. "Come, Simon."

When they were gone, John drew out the letter and examined it again. It had been originally sent to *The Badgers*, and re-addressed.

He opened it. It was from Hetty, and ran thus:

My own Jack,—Where are you? where are you? I sit alone all day long and think of you and wait for you and you do not come. I am shrivelled up like a dead flower. I have been ill. I have passed through the shadow. I am all worn away and nothing remains. I have not enough self-respect left to cover my heart with. I want you. I long, I pine for you. Come to me. All my friends stay away and the days are years. I might be old and hideous. Come, come, come!—Your Hetty.

He went straight out, leaving no message with his parents.

"Damn everything!" he said. "She's worth the world!"

He strode along at a great pace.

"She says 'I might be old and hideous.' That means she has not lost her beauty. What funny creatures women are! She didn't see the significance of that. Women always underline what they want you to notice. . . . It's queer how the very thought of her kindles me! . . . I don't suppose any other woman would write in the same way. . . . She's awfully fond of me. Fancy a woman like that being fond of any one. . . . I like the way she treats me. It's a half-motherly way. I suppose she's pretty old. And she thinks she can twist me round her finger. Ha, ha! I am hardly the boy she imagines. I could walk away from her at any moment. I *did!* . . . I'm walking back, though."

This last reflection disgusted him somewhat.

"Then there's Eva."

His pace slackened.

"Damn everything!" he said again, and strode onward as before, whistling softly.

He came to her house at last and knocked for admission. A maiden, hideously freckled, led him to her room.

She rose at his entry. She had been sitting on a couch near the grate, in which a fire burned, despite the season. A battalion of medicine bottles crowded the tiny table in the centre of the floor and lined the mantel. The air of the room was soft and warm and heavy. It was a small room, expensively furnished in reckless, untidy style. The curtains were drawn and the gas was lighted. Hetty wore a loose, flannel gown, laced at the neck and wrists. A scarlet bow fluttered on her bosom. Her appearance had undergone a great change. Her face was pallid and thin; her form, that had been obese, was hardly voluptuous now; the dye had faded from her hair and left it dully brown. Her expression was demure, almost sad. Yet, he confessed it with a great thrill, she was nearer being beautiful than she had ever been. She was Hetty with Hetty's grossness drained away; an etherealised, spiritualized Hetty; younger, more fragile.

He was too much surprised to move or speak, so that Hetty had advanced to the centre of the room ere his hand was off the latch. He went forward and would have crushed her in his arms, but she held him off.

"You may have one kiss," she said, "because I am an

invalid and must be indulged, and you may have another kiss because you are come at last and it is good of you. But no more than that."

She held up her face, still keeping her hands extended; and he kissed her twice, laughing.

"Your blood be on your own head," he said.

She sat down on the couch. He would have sat down beside her, but she motioned him imperiously to take a chair opposite her, on the further side of the hearthrug.

"What's the idea?" he exclaimed.

"You must," she said. And he bit his lips and obeyed her.

There was a long silence. He sat, with his chin in his hand, watching her.

"I have been so ill, Jack," she said at last. "I thought I was going to die."

"As bad as that?"

"Worse, much worse. I wouldn't have minded dying so much. It was not dying that hurt me. Every morning I prayed that I might not see the night, and every night I prayed that I might not see the morning. O, the agony of living through it all! I wanted the end to come."

"You prayed!"

"Yes. Why not? I was afraid."

He sniggered.

"Why have you not been to see me?" she asked.

"I couldn't."

"Eh?"

"I have been ill, too."

"I always said you were rather a poor liar, Jack."

A sense of the alteration in her struck him anew. He did not answer her.

"When did you get my letter?"

"To-day."

"You must give it back to me."

"Your letter?"

"Yes."

"But why?"

"I want it."

"I want it, too."

"I want it most. You must give it back."

"I don't think I shall."

"Yes, yes. Give it me."

He reflected, then produced the letter and tossed it across to her.

"I don't want it to that extent," he said.

She threw it on the fire. He started forward to rescue it but she interposed her person.

"Sit down," she said. "I wanted that letter unwritten."

He sat down.

"It was my letter, you know," he grumbled. "Though of course, it doesn't matter a bit."

"No, it doesn't matter," she agreed. "It has served its purpose. You are here."

"I don't quite understand you, Hetty," he said. "But I think you've altered considerably for the worse since I saw you last."

She laughed.

"If you don't like it, you know, you may go," she said.

He flushed angrily.

"What do you mean?" he cried.

"Though I am a woman I mean what I say for once," she replied.

"And you tell me to go?"

He rose. She nodded.

"Good-by."

He held out his hand. She gave him two fingers.

"Good-by," she said.

He hesitated.

"No; I'm damned if I'll be turned out like this," he said, and sat down again.

"I knew you wouldn't go," she told him.

He was enraged and discomfited. He tried to laugh and the result was a snigger. Then he became stern.

"Look here, Hetty," he said, "I wish you wouldn't play about like this. Of course, you've been ill and all that and I can excuse you. Still——"

"My dear Mr. Coldershaw," she said, "I am very sorry for you."

"Sorry—for me! Why?"

"Because things have turned out so otherwise. And I know how annoying that is. You expected to find me plastic as I used to be, didn't you? Instead of that you find me hard and inflexible. It must be rather a severe shock. That's why I'm sorry for you."

He shouted derisively.

"I hardly know how to break it to you," she said; "I am afraid I must though. It is very awkward. You are so vain, too! But to put it shortly, my dear boy, you cloy, you pall."

"Eh?"

"Don't you remember I told you at our last meeting that every delight cloys with me after a time? that everything palls? Well; *you* cloy, *you* pall now."

"Why?"

"When I wrote to you I didn't know that you would cloy. I feared you might, but I wasn't sure. My fear was confirmed on the instant that you entered this room. I am very sorry for you. And I hope you didn't contemplate any display of rudeness. If I were you I would keep quite still for just ten minutes. That will give you time to realize things. Then I would steal softly and silently away."

She leaned back and picked up a fan. He looked at her and scowled blackly. For a space he sat in sullen silence; then, he rose.

She touched the bell, and the hideously freckled maiden came to usher him out. He uttered no word of farewell.

When he was gone Hetty sighed and let fall the fan.

"I think he will come back," she said.

CHAPTER XIII

Mr. Henson Cleogh, a prudent man, was carefully auditing his books before starting for his annual holiday. A great array of ponderous ledgers was spread out before him on his desk, over which he hovered, pen in hand. His coat was off and his grey hair, very thin and reedy in the neighbourhood of the crown, was rumpled and tumbled, for figures were his weakness and the year had been heavy with profitable labour. Then, as it was a hot day, and his clients were mostly out of London, he felt free to be comfortable. It is delicious to be unprofessional occasionally.

He trotted into the outer office, where his clerks were brooding heavily in the dusty heat, and asked:

"Is Underton in?"

The office-boy slipped a surreptitious novelette under his blotting-pad and replied:

"No, sir."

"Where's he gone?"

"I don't know, sir."

"I want his cash-book."

"Yes, sir."

The cash-book was handed to him and he went back to resume his audit of his books.

A sad-faced clerk, his clothes covered with powdered chalk so that he might have been mistaken for a miller, looked up from the parchment on which he was writing and addressed the office-boy:

"Do you know what I think of old Cleogh?" he said.

"No," replied the boy, but without manifesting curiosity.

"It's a good job you don't," rejoined his senior. "If you did you'd feel as old as I do. And you're too old for your age as it is."

"This is rash talk for a hot day, ain't it?"

"I ain't ever been in a' office before where the guv'nor

stayed after the twentieth at the latest. I feel quite ashamed of him. It isn't right. We might be County Courters for all the self-respect he has. And, what's more, I ain't going to stand it."

"I've noticed you ain't been doing much standing of any sort lately. There's a dinner and two bitters due to me now."

"And there's a funeral overdue, so shut it."

"What I like about you is your tractabiliousness," said the office-boy.

"What I don't like about you is you," retorted the clerk.

The boy grinned. "As I've had occasion to remark before," he said, "you've got shocking bad taste."

And he drew out the surreptitious novelette and resumed his reading.

Underton came in.

"Guv'nor wants you," said the office-boy.

Dick knocked at the door of his principal's room and was admitted.

"You want me, sir?"

"Yes."

Mr. Cleogh stood up and frowned. Dick's eyes flinched and his cheeks grew white. The perspiration started out on his forehead.

"Shut the door and sit down," said Mr. Cleogh. "I want to ask you a question."

"Yes, sir," muttered Dick, hoarsely.

"I want to know why you drew two pounds yesterday for petty cash?"

"It was needed for things in the office."

"But you already had four pounds eight and three in hand."

Dick was silent.

"This won't do, you know, Underton; this won't do," said Mr. Cleogh. "I hardly expected such conduct from you. What made you get behindhand! Any private trouble? any illness?"

"No, sir."

"What was it?"

"Nothing particular, sir."

"Does 'nothing particular' mean gambling or betting? But I don't want to cross-examine you about it. You

need not tell me. And I'm not going to have you locked up."

"Thank you, sir."

"You have been a good servant and I want to be a just master. But I must have that money repaid to me to-morrow or you go. And, of course, I couldn't give you a character."

Dick wetted his dry lips with his tongue and ground the palms of his hands together.

"A sharp lesson may do you good just at this crisis," said Mr. Cleogh. "I insist on the immediate repayment of the money. If it is forthcoming to-morrow I will overlook your fault this time. That is all. You may go."

Dick staggered into the outer office and sank down at his desk with a groan. He covered his face with his hands.

"Let us pray!" said the office-boy.

Mr. Cleogh bustled into the office.

"Ill, Underton?" he asked.

"No, sir; I——"

"You can go, if you like. I sha'n't want you any more to-day. Take a long walk into the country."

"Thank you, sir."

Dick staggered out with a whirling brain.

The air of the busy streets was heavy and hot. He felt that Mr. Cleogh's advice was sound. He would take a long walk into the country. He struck eastward, passing through Whitechapel, Stepney, Bow, and so into the fields around Epping. He flung himself down on the grass under a tree and lay there for fully two hours. But he could not think clearly. He could only watch the cloud-speckled sky and wonder why people ever laughed. He felt that this was the end of him. It was only left to him to die. He knew no one to whom he could go for help or even advice. He had made only one friend and that friend had betrayed him. The weak tears filled his eyes at the thought of John Coldershaw's defection, and he turned over on his face and wept out his misery upon his arm. He rose, dazed and shaken, and started to go back. He took no heed of time or distance, but trudged along doggedly with bent head and elbows squared till he was at his lodgings. He went upstairs to his room and sat down on the bed and stared about him vacantly.

It was all over. He had played his hand in the game

of life and lost. He might have won, too. That was the bitterness of it! But to face the problem. He looked round the room; such an untidy, unclean room. There was nothing in it worth the trouble of removal. He had pawned everything of value; his clothes, his watch, his Brummagem jewellery. For a fortnight he had eaten nothing but biscuits; hard, dry biscuits that distend the stomach and blunt the appetite. God, but he had been a fool!

He went down on his knees beside an old deal box; not to pray. He lifted the lid and took out some letters. They were ill-written, badly-spelt letters, but every one of them had cost its author hours of weary toil, and he kissed them for that sake. They were letters from a sister, his only relative, a woman older than he, who served as housemaid in a great house away north of York until he should be rich enough to have her to live with him in London. He cried again over the letters, for he was a watery-headed youth. It did not matter that the room was dark. He could still read them, for every crooked lane of words was familiar ground. He knelt there beside the box for a great time.

Then he rose and turned wearily to the window where black shadows shot up into the blue sky and stars shone dimly through the smoke-clouds.

John Coldershaw was surprised to receive a visit from Dick Underton that night.

Ten days had elapsed since his dismissal at the hands of Hetty. On his way back from her he had gone into a public-house to ease the wound in his self-respect, and had stayed there till midnight. He had been exceedingly merry, drinking deeply and often with whomsoever would. At closing time he had started out to walk home, bareheaded, through a hard shower of rain, and had lost his way many times. He awoke in his bed on the following morning without realizing himself. He was in a state of high fever, and all day he raved raucously in delirium. He recovered his mind on the next day, but was still too ill to rise, and thus he remained for a week. His first conscious thought was of Hetty, and he longed ardently to visit her again; he wanted to display his indifference before her. His last memory of her had inflamed him with desire;

he hated her, and he wanted to possess her. His passions overweighted his failing strength so that he could not long sustain them. Had he been well enough he would have gone straight and lost himself to her eternally; his spirit, indeed, was willing, but his flesh was weak. By giving him time to adjust his mind, his sickness proved his salvation. On the eighth day he received a letter from Eva. It was the first, and it killed Hetty's last chance.

"Dear Mr. Coldershaw," said Eva, "I am going away to-morrow to stay for a time in Warmouth-on-Sea, at lodgings that my lawyer has kindly found for me. I write to tell you this in case you should be calling at Chater Park Gardens. Not having seen you for a week, I am inclined to be afraid that you are ill; I hope this is not so.—With kind regards, yours sincerely, EVA HARDROP."

"Queer little soul!" was John's comment on the letter.

He was out of bed on the following day. When Dick Underton called he was packing his trunks.

Mrs. Coldershaw announced the visitor.

"It's that nasty Underton?" she said. "I told him you was ill."

"Underton!"

"Shall I tell him to go away?"

"O, no; let's have the fool up. He'll amuse me."

Mrs. Coldershaw faltered in the doorway.

"I do wish you wouldn't go with him," she said. "I'm sure it's him that that leads you astray."

"What rot!"

"I can read him if you can't. He's got deceit written on his face as plain as plain."

John laughed.

"I want to see him," he said. "It's precious dull here, and he'll be a diversion."

Mrs. Coldershaw withdrew, and presently Dick knocked at the door.

John sang out "Come in," and Dick entered.

He stood awkwardly in the doorway, fumbling his hat and smiling faintly. His face was stained with tears and sweat; his hair hung in limp disorder over his forehead.

"How do you do, Jack?" he murmured, extending his hand.

"Sit down," said John, disregarding the hand. "What do you want? Have you come to beg my pardon?"

Dick nodded in abject humility.

John was well pleased at this reversion to a proper order of things, and laughed affably.

"That's all right," he said. "I'm not one to bear malice. Have anything?"

"No, thanks, Jack."

"Not a smoke?"

"O, well, yes; I'll have a pipe with you."

"What a damned fool you were the other day, Dick!" said John, after a pause. "I can't make out why I didn't punch your head. I must have been sickening for this illness that has lately laid me by the heels, I suppose."

"Have you been ill?"

"Yes, bad. Getting wet, outside and in, did the business finally, I think. It was rheumatic fever of a sort."

"I'm very sorry. I'd have called if I'd known."

"You would have been a godsend. I've been in the blues ever since I saw you last. Illness takes it out of a man so. You're not looking like the Angel Gabriel either. When did you wash your face and do your hair last?"

"Eh? I don't know." He crossed over to the glass. "I am a bit untidy."

"Untidy isn't the word. You've got a perfect haystack on your back, and there's enough clay on your trousers to stock Israel. What have you been doing? Arguing with an Irishman?"

"No. I laid down on the grass."

"What made you tired?"

"Jack, I'm in trouble."

John Coldershaw whistled softly and smiled.

"I come to you for advice and assistance, you being the only friend I have," said Dick. "Will you help me?"

"Can't say," replied John. "Pass the matches. Well?"

Dick sat down and spread his hands on his knees. John leaned back in his chair and pulled hard at his pipe.

"Well?" he said again.

Dick looked at him with wistful eyes.

"Did I ever tell you about my sister?" he asked.

John stared. "No, I think not."

"It isn't easy to talk about what we think of most, is it?"

"Is she pretty?"

"She is the best woman in the world."

"They're all the best women in the world on *some*body's showing. I hope she isn't like you."

"God forbid!"

"What fervour! Well?"

"I'm not boring you?"

"N—no."

"I feel that I ought to have told you about her before. It would have drawn us closer together."

John laughed.

"She's so good," said Dick, anxiously, "so pure, so sweet. Everybody loves her and she loves everybody. She thinks I'm the finest fellow in the world."

"She'll get over that."

"We were always close chums, she and I. We went to school together, played together, shared each other's sweetstuff, told lies to our schoolmistress in each other's defence, stole things out of the pantry for one another. And when our mother died we stood hand-in-hand beside her death-bed and received her impartial blessing."

"You've let your pipe out. Yes?"

"Circumstances have parted us," said Dick; "but our love for one another is still the same. She writes to me every week, such dear, kind letters, all about my meals and my flannels and not getting my feet wet. You see, she's a woman, and women always think men don't know how to take care of themselves. When I first started work I put aside something every week out of my wages against the time when I should have enough to bring her up to London to live with me, though I didn't earn then one-quarter of what I earn now. You see, she's in service in Yorkshire."

John's lip curled.

"It was the delight of my life to add to that little store of money once. But lately, I don't know how it is—I hate and loathe myself for doing such a thing—I have not saved anything, I have even dared to use that little store of money, and now it is all gone. And she doesn't know; she is still looking forward to the time when we shall be united again. O Jack, I have been a fool, a brute, and worse. And now it seems I am to lose my situation, to be thrown out of work, without a character, without a chance of ever finding fresh employment. I am in debt, too. These clothes I am

wearing now are the only ones I've got, and in all this great London there isn't a soul I can go to for help or advice except you, not one who would give me a crust of bread or a shake-down for the night."

"It's awkward for you, of course," said John; "still ——"

"Don't, please don't!"

His voice rang shrilly.

"Don't kick up that row," said John, "or the Mater will be coming up to ask who has seen a mouse."

"I beg your pardon, Jack. But I'm so upset. I'm all unstrung. You will help me, Jack, won't you? I only want five pounds, I can manage the rest. And I'll pay you back every farthing. If it was for my own sake I wouldn't dare ask you, but——"

"Cut the cant, Dick."

"It's for my sister's sake. She believes in me. It will break her heart. Jack, for God's sake lend me the money. I'll go down on my knees if that will please you. I'll do anything, Jack!"

John Coldershaw frowned.

"Don't be such an ass," he said. "You're worse than a woman. What do you want to flop about like this for?"

"No, no, no, Jack. Don't sneer at me. It isn't a lark. I can't bear it. Be kind to me, Jack. I know I was rude the other day——"

"You were! Damned rude!"

"Forgive me! See, I'm on my knees to you. And you are younger than me. There ain't a man I'd kneel to for my own sake."

"Cut that cant, Dick."

"I'll do anything, Jack. I will, so help me God. And it's only five pounds. I see you are packing to go away. You're sure to have some ready money about you. Give me five pounds. O, my God! Wait a minute, Jack, wait a minute. Don't say no yet. Think a bit. I don't want to say anything to annoy you. But . . . . I've often fetched and carried for you, Jack. If it hadn't been for me you wouldn't ever have known Miss Hardrop. And I found out about her money, too. Yes, I know you would have done as much for me. You didn't get a chance. That's right enough. And you are generous and a real gentleman. I recognise all that, Jack. I'm only a snob,

I know, and not everybody would have been friends with me. I am grateful, Jack. I am, truly. And you will lend me this money?"

His voice broke and he fell, extended face forward, on the floor.

"Get up," said John Coldershaw.

"Let me lie here, Jack."

"Get up. I'm not going to lend you the money. I might have done it two minutes ago. But all that about Eva—Miss Hardrop, and so on, has spoilt it. You talk about what you've done for me. What have I done for you? I've shown you round; put you up for *The Badgers;* taken you among gentlemen. And you talk about what you've done for me! Besides, I owe you one for what you did in Staple Inn. You were very clever then, you rotten blackguard!" His memory kindled his anger. "Pay for your cleverness now. Go back to your dirty lodgings and grizzle. Perhaps, if you write to your sister and cry enough over the notepaper she'll——"

Dick rose.

"Stop it," he said, quietly. "Anything else you like; but not that."

John laughed and sank back in his chair. He lit his pipe and blew a succession of rings to the ceiling. Dick stood watching him.

"Well?" said John, "aren't you going? Or do you want to be slung out?"

Dick left the room without a word, and descended softly to the street.

Mrs. Coldershaw peeped at him through the parlour-window, as he walked swiftly past.

"I'm sure it was him as led my boy astray!" she said.

CHAPTER XIV

"THERE was a young man," said Mr. Wyber, "and he disappeared, and I did not shed a tear. He was an utterly impossible person. He lingers in my memory as an unsatisfactory background to a beautiful tie. Do you know what has become of him?"

Hetty laughed and shook her head. Mr. Wyber had been dining with her, and they were smoking post-prandial cigarettes in the half-light.

"He was one of your lost delights," said Wyber. "I think you brought him to my house once. And he was the comic relief.

"Ah-h-h!" cried Hetty. "John Coldershaw."

"That was his awful name."

"You must not speak of him to me. He is an utterly hateful boy. I have done with him."

"What have you done with him?"

"Don't! I never want to see him again. Let us talk about something else."

"The art of talking about something else is imperfectly understood in this country, I find," said Mr. Wyber. "I, personally, always want to talk about something else. Unfortunately, so many people confuse something else with the weather or politics."

"He is a perfectly detestable creature!"

"Who is a perfectly detestable creature?"

"John Coldershaw."

"I thought we were talking about something else."

"Yes, let us. I think he is a cad."

"John Coldershaw?"

"Of course! Who else? How dull you are!"

"Can the moon shine as the sun from which she steals her light?"

"Bother! I've a good mind to talk about him after all."

"John Coldershaw?"

Hetty threw her cigarette at him ; then flew to save her curtains.

"You ducked!" she exclaimed, indignantly. "You must have done."

She resumed her seat.

"What were we talking about?" she asked.

"I think it was 'ducks,'" replied Wyber. "Or was it something else?"

"It must have been something else," said Hetty. "I was just saying what I thought about him."

"John Coldershaw?"

Hetty shook her fist; then shut her eyes and clasped her hands in mock entreaty.

"Please pander to me, sir," she murmured.

"I will pander."

"I want you to know about him. He came to see me about a week ago. You know why?"

"No."

"Didn't I tell you? O, I had determined that he should marry me. It was in my mind from the first. I settled it finally while I was ill. I made my plans very carefully. He is just clever enough to know he is not a fool; and that kind of man needs rather skilful handling."

"You are a strange woman," said the poet." "But go on."

"I wrote him a passionate letter, full of love and slosh, which brought him here at once. I got the letter back from him, and burnt it before his eyes. I laughed at him. I was rude to him. He said 'Very well,' with hauteur, and went to the door to depart, and came back again, just as I knew he would. Then I taunted him with his vacillation, laughed at him all over again, and sent him away, and did not ask him to come back. You see, he needed skilful handling."

"Eh?" cried Wyber. "And, of course, he has not been here since?"

"There is no 'of course' in the matter," said Hetty. "That shows how stupid clever men are."

"He came back?"

"Every law of probability was in favour of his doing so. Any woman, not in love, would have felt justified in expecting him to return. And you say, 'Of course, he did not come back.' O, what fools men are!"

"Did he come back?"

"Of course he didn't. That's the aggravation of it. That's why I loathe and detest him. He had the audacity, the effrontery, the—the horridness to stay away. And I had made my plans so carefully, and they had worked out just right to that point. I should like to kill him. After I had made provision for every chance, too. It is maddening!"

"You did not make provision for the chance of failure."

"Who does? No; his conduct is an insult to my intelligence, and I can never forgive him."

"He may be ill."

"I try not to think so. It is so improbable, and so soothing. If once I entertained the idea I should soften toward him. And I don't want to."

"Is he rich?"

"A banker's son, I believe." She threw herself on her back with a little, strangled cry. "Please don't talk to me for a minute," she said, "or I shall make a scene."

There was a term of silence.

"But why should you marry at all?" asked the poet.

"I have my reasons."

"Are reasons necessary?"

"Not usually, I believe; but, in my case, yes."

"I should like to know your reasons."

"You shall see them."

She went to a drawer and took out a roll of papers.

"Here are thirteen of the best reasons in the world for matrimony," said Hetty.

"Writs?" asked the poet.

Hetty nodded. "And summonses and bankruptcy notices."

"Let me help you," said the poet. "I've got a lot of money in my pocket. I don't know how much. It isn't worth while to know how much."

He laid a roll of notes on the table. Hetty averted her gaze.

"I am horribly rich, you know," continued the poet. "And I have a very enterprising lawyer. He is always sending me money, and wanting to see me on business. I tell him that I have something more important than business to attend to. He says, 'What could be more

important than business, Mister Wyber?' And I say, 'Pleasure.' And he laughs. I don't like him."

The conversation became impersonal. Presently, the Poet rose to go. Hetty accompanied him to the door.

"Good-by," she said.

He took her in his arms and kissed her. She brushed the powder from his coat with her hand. He lingered.

"Would you like a flower, a rose?" she asked him.

"Above all things," he replied.

She went back to her room, bidding him wait there, and picked up the roll of notes and ran a brisk finger through them.

"Only thirty pounds!" she said. "Mean beast!"

She took a rose from the bowl of flowers on the table and went down to him again, and fastened it in his coat.

"Good-by, sweetmeat," she said, kissing him on her own initiative this time. He took her in his arms again, and again she had to brush off the powder from his coat. Then she opened the door.

"Hullo!" he cried, starting back. "What is this?"

A man was sitting on the topmost step with his head resting wearily against the iron railings.

"Come, be off!" said Hetty, sharply.

He turned his head and the light of the hall-lamp fell across his face.

"Why, it's Mr. Underton," cried Hetty.

"How dreadful!" murmured Wyber.

Dick looked at her. He did not trouble to rise to his feet.

"Are you ill?" asked Hetty.

He made no answer.

"Did you want to see me? Perhaps you come from Mr. Coldershaw."

Dick scowled.

"Coldershaw!" he muttered. "Yes; I have just left him."

"Come in, do come in," said Hetty. She turned to Wyber. "Once more, good-by."

The Poet sniffed and went away down the steps, flourishing his hat.

"I am so glad to see you, Mr. Underton," said Hetty.

He made no response.

"Please don't sit there," she continued. "Come inside. I'm afraid you must be ill."

"I wish I was ill," said Dick, huskily. "I wish I was dead."

"Please, please don't say such awful things."

She gave him her hand and helped him to rise. She brought him into the house and led him upstairs to her room. He sank down, trembling, in a great, deep-cushioned chair and cast his hat aside and ran his fingers through his damp, disordered hair. His white face shone; his eyes were wide; his lips were parched and black.

"I am sure you are ill," said Hetty, sitting down near him.

"No," he said, shaking his head.

"There is something the matter?

He did not answer.

"What news do you bring of Mr. Coldershaw?"

Two spots of colour blazed in his cheeks. He struck his knee with his fist, and echoed the name "Coldershaw!" coupling it with a foul oath. Hetty rose and went over to the door and sat down there. Dick rose, too, and put his hands on the table. He leaned forward and regarded her, fixedly.

"You say 'What news?'" he said, speaking slowly and hoarsely. "There is no news. He is just the same blackguard he always was! The same foul, false thing!"

"Have you quarrelled with him?"

He laughed and nodded.

"Tell me about it," said Hetty.

He swayed unsteadily and his lips moved, but no word came.

"Let me give you some brandy," said Hetty. She poured out a glassful and handed it to him. He raised it to his lips, spilling full half of it on his shirt, and put it down again, empty. As he did so he saw the roll of notes. He took them up.

"What are you doing?" Hetty demanded, with some shrillness. "Those are mine."

"Give me one," said Dick.

"Really——"

"Only one. This one——five pounds. Give me it."

"No; put it down."

"I won't."

Hetty was frightened and angry.

"If you don't put it down and leave me at once," she said, "I shall call assistance and have you locked up."

She went to the door and opened it.

"Come, Mr. Underton, put it down."

He heeded her not.

She came back.

"I think you must be mad," she said.

He looked at her and the senile grin wrinkling his features died away. She saw his face change suddenly. He put his hand to his head and drew in his breath with a long hissing inspiration.

"Eh? What?" he cried. "Who are you?"

He was as one startled suddenly from sleep.

"I forgot," he said.

He put back the notes.

"What did I say?" he asked. "Where am I? Who brought me here?"

She poured out another glassful of brandy.

"Drink it," she said. "And don't talk for a minute or two. Think a bit. Something has happened to you. What was it?"

He sat down, limply, and stared into the fire.

"I can't think," he said, piteously.

"Yes, yes," said Hetty. "You quarrelled with Jack? He has injured you?"

He groaned.

"I know now," he muttered.

"Take your time," said Hetty.

He sat, quite silent, for some minutes. Her patience died.

"Come," she said, "tell me all about it. I am interested in him, too. He was to marry me."

"No; he was to marry Eva—Miss Hardrop," said Dick. "He never thought of you in that way. He used to laugh at you."

Hetty bridled. "And I at him," she added.

"You were very fond of him, he said."

"I was very fond of his money."

"It wasn't his money; it was his poor father's."

"His *rich* father's."

"I suppose he is rich, as builders go."

He still spoke as a man half dazed.

"Builder!" exclaimed Hetty. But she recovered herself and bit her lip. "He told me his father was a banker, the snob!" she reflected.

Dick was communing with himself in a muffled undertone. She refilled his glass and pushed it toward him. He lifted it to his lips and drank again.

"Come," said Hetty, "tell me about it, about this other woman."

"Why should I?" he asked, stubbornly. "What is it to you?"

"It is a great deal to me. I want to know. And I will give you the five pounds."

He flushed and hesitated.

"No," he said, at last.

She slipped the banknote into his hand and leaned over him, with her arm resting half on the back of his chair, half on his shoulders.

"Come, tell me," she said.

He leered up at her.

CHAPTER XV

ALL day hard, grey clouds had shut out the heavens, and the sodden earth had stewed as under a leaden dish-cover, its imprisoned reek and stink rising in steam to the cold sky, and dissolving into greasy rain. Now, God had raised the dish-cover, and the light and the pure air were streaming in. A magic golden ring spanned the earth, marking the horizon. Stains of blood rusted the gold at the eve of night, just where the drab sea touched the sky, and amber stars gleamed and sparkled in a setting of silver and green. From the zenith downward the sky was dark and heavy, and flat around the land lay black and dead with, perhaps, a feeble hint of orange in its blackness borrowed from the blazing West, or a stain of crimson where some stagnant pool lay flush with the shrivelled grass.

Eva came down to the old stone breakwater from her little house at the back of the town, and strolled along in the face of the feeble wind, enjoying the illimitable prospect of beach and sea and sky. She had arrived by train early that morning, and had spent the weary afternoon behind the window of her little parlour. She had brought Polly Weed with her, and Polly Weed had dozed away the hours in a chintz-covered armchair, being tired with travelling and impatient of the fickle weather. Tea had put a period to the old woman's drowsiness, and let loose a flood of garrulity in her. Eva strove to appear interested, with sufficient success to encourage Polly to further talk, but the meal ended, she had broken away and insisted on a mad sally into the open. She had asked Polly Weed to accompany her, but Polly refused, and Eva was glad that she refused.

The big, brown sails of the little fishing-boats flapped with sharp cracks like pistol reports in the gusty air. The sulky sea, every wave of which suggested a shrugging

shoulder, was dotted over with specks of white canvas. Right on the golden verge of the world stood the black *silhouette* of a great battleship, a cloud rolling out behind it, a white fountain spouting at its prow, a lane of snow trailing in its wake. Eva caught the soft hoot-hoot of its steam-whistle; there was an answering shriek from the railway, half a mile distant.

There was a goodly crowd of people scattered over the breakwater and the pier; idlers from London chiefly, over-eager to make the most of their brief, annual holiday. A few of the men stooped to peep under her bonnet, because her face was pretty; a burly boatman, smoking a foul cutty, touched his cap and gave her a gruff "Evenin', miss," because her face was good.

She left the town-beach behind her, and followed the breakwater to the point where it ended abruptly in a mound of grey pebbles. She started to climb over these, but it was too hard going; and presently she had to pause for lack of breath. She sat down on the heaped stones and disposed her dress about her. The weary wind had gone to rest on the banks of a sluggish mud-river behind her, and was stirring the rushes as they met over him with his lusty limbs. She listened, and that was how her young fancy put it. It was sweet to linger there with the scent of the salt sea filling her nostrils, and the music of the listless waves awaking endless echoes in her brain. She fell to dreaming, and was very happy in her dreams. And all the time the changing beauties of the wide scape held her eyes and framed the pictures of her imagination.

The day faded and night fell, touching the stretched wind with a finger of ice, so that it started from sleep with a harsh scream and went raging and roaring through the world. It battered and harried the clouds till they massed together in self-defence and dissolved in large, warm tears.

Eva sat in the pelting rain for some minutes ere she realised that it was not good for her to be there. Then she rose and gathered up her skirts, and ran. The wind tore and touzled her hair, and sang in her ears and mantled the blood in her cheeks. The rain fell in long spirals, rattling on the old stones of the breakwater and splashing up in clouds of silver spray; the earth seemed carpeted with mist.

Once she sought refuge in a crazy wooden "shelter,"

but two pairs of lovers were already there, huddled together in chaotic heaps of arms and legs at either extremity of the seat. She gave one glance at them and fled onward.

She had traversed the winding length of the puddled High Street and was within hail of her lodgings when the swift, incoming rush of a train drew her to the railway-station. She stood on the platform and watched the red eyes of the engine growing bigger and bigger, as if in amaze at their own mad advance. Swart officials in gleaming oilskins darted across the silver lines of the coaly way, swinging lanterns and bellowing. The train drew up with a rattle and hiss and spurt, and the doors of the carriages flew open and the passengers stumbled out on the platform—such a sleepy, dishevelled crew! Eva drew back into the shadow and scanned each face as it passed under the smoky light of the lamps. The face she sought was not among them. Something chilled her for a moment, a vague, unmaidenly fear, a twinge of disappointment; but she reflected that certain things were inevitable, and smiled herself back into a good humour. A gruff man in a wet pilot coat and a hat with a gold band round it, challenged her at the barrier.

"Ticket, please," he said.

She lifted her head, and he touched his hat and let her pass; for he remembered her face, though he had only seen it once before, and then in a crowd. She was pleased at his quick recognition of her, and put a shilling in his great hard hand and gave him a blithe "good night" and a backward glance as she fluttered out at the door into the furious night.

Polly Weed had grown anxious during Eva's protracted absence, and was waiting at the door for her with a shawl wound round her grey head.

"Where *have* ye been?" she cried, dragging Eva into the warm, snug parlour.

"Up in the sky and down in the depths of the sea; to the uttermost end of the earth and back again," replied Eva. "And it has made me hungry; not hungry for things ethereal, but just hungry for food, hungry in a coarse-grained tatterdemalion fashion."

"Ye're soppin' wet!" said Polly Weed, passing a skinny hand over her, "and yer dress is all of a mess wi' sand an' seaweed. Go upstairs an' change yer things at once."

"Must I?"

"At once. I'll 'ave supper ready agin ye come back."

Eva went up to her room and pushed up her window and looked out, leaning her arms on the sill. The cold air swept in and extinguished her candle. The warm rain spattered on her glowing cheeks. After an interval, she shut the window and went and sluiced her face at the tiny, green-painted washstand, and dressed her tangled, wet hair before the glass, picking the loose clotted strands off her cheeks in a way that was entrancing because she was Eva, and changed her gown, and went downstairs again.

Polly Weed, who had no sense of propriety, was assisting the landlady of the house to spread the cloth for supper. There was ham that curled in pink wafers under the knife, and crisp green salad, and white home-made bread, and what-not; and everything was quite dainty and very appetising. The room was a comfortable, artistic outrage; a supererogatory fire burned in the grate; the window-curtains veiled the inclemency of the night without shutting it out altogether; and the house was built just badly enough to creak and crack in the storm. It was a merry meal, made piquant with the sauce of healthy appetite.

The rain stopped while the eating was in progress, and the moon came out and threw a ring of mysterious blue light on the carpet. Eva, who could never have enough of the joy that comes in with the rush of the sea, declared that they must hie down to the shore again to see the waves by the light of night. Polly Weed put in a feeble demurrer, but it was overruled.

"Go upstairs and dress at once, old thing," commanded Eva, and took her by the shoulders and ran her out of the room.

But when Polly Weed, after an absence of five minutes, came down with shawl and bonnet on, she found Eva rosily asleep in the great armchair, her pure face set in the golden aureola of her hair, her thin hands lying idle in her lap.

She was carried off to the top of the house at once and put to bed. She was asleep ere Polly Weed had tucked the sheets under her, and the old woman's kiss came to her, disguised, in a dream.

In the morning she was up with the sun and out upon

the beach. The tide was at ebb and there was a wide sweep of yellow-grey sand between the beach and the sea. Masses of black, flat-topped rocks marked the margin of the water. The sky was blue and clean of clouds. A stiff breeze was blowing in. Eva went right down to where the tiny waves lapped the sand and walked along, quite slowly, looking outward. Only natives were abroad; a few bare-legged youngsters with brown faces and tow-heads, carrying slimy baskets; some women, bare-legged also, stepping freely, with rude grace, among the rocks; a party of men in doeskin breeches, blue guernseys, and fur caps, smoking pipes over their sails and nets. An odour of tar mingled with the scent of ocean, not unpleasantly. One of the bare-legged women was singing a dismal ballad of shipwreck, but blithely; her voice blent harmoniously with the music of the sea.

Eva walked a great way and then sped back across country, through the ripe corn, over a hill crowned with a windmill on the side of which a small house was fastened, like a wen, with a woman at the exalted door of it, and children, who might have been angels, ascending and descending a very Jacob's ladder—for did it not lead to a home and is not home paradise? Eva turned the corner and there was a well, with a white-headed man working it, a picturesque old man, with a black patch of hair on either cheek, whose red neckcloth and blue shirt supplied just that touch of crude colour which the landscape needed. Accident is a very good artist or we should not throw up potatoes when we plant trees. Eva asked the old man for a drink of water because she lacked an excuse to talk to him, and drank the water because it was so sweet and cool. . . . This was a wonderful old man, straight and strong, and fairly lithe, of great age, and speaking an unknown tongue. Eva gave him her hand at parting and he wiped his own on his breeches before taking it and then thanked her afterwards, quite simply, so that Eva loved him for his gentle chivalry.

But the sun was getting up apace and the shadows were dwindling.

When Eva looked into her glass that night before saying her prayers she saw that the hills of her face were very pink indeed and the dales very white, by contrast. And

that reminded her to thank God specially for His good sunshine. She lay down and sank to sleep with a smile on her lips and a great happiness and a sweet expectancy in her heart.

"Then there is to-morrow," she said, opening her eyes in the middle of the dark night to say it, and closing them again. "Then there is to-morrow!"

CHAPTER XVI

"'WINE from the wood.' Play, Major, eh? Ripped again, the rotten rag. 'Wine from the wood.' Play again, Major. 'Luscious an' good.' Thirty-five me, nineteen you. It oughtn't to have been all-fours. A fluke? So's life a fluke. And that's a damned good epigram. Me! 'But when a young feller drinks more than he should—ugh!—we all say, the wine has gone back to the wood.' Again! Hallo!"

John Coldershaw sat up in bed and opened his eyes on the dawn.

"Where are you, Major?"

He passed his fingers through his hair, threw back the bedclothes, and staggered out across the room to the window. The floor heaved and the walls went whirling.

"It's where am I, John Coldershaw?" he muttered. "O, my God!"

He sidled along the wall, with arms outspread.

"What a tin lining to have in one's mouth!" he muttered, mumbling his parched lips. "And a head like a burning cinder. Ugh!"

He seized the water-jug and drank thirstily.

"Now I'm nearly my own man. Half a minute."

He filled the basin and dipped his head. Again. Again. The water trickled down his breast and filtered through his nightgown and dripped, dripped on the floor. He went to the window and threw it open. The cold air streamed in and played about his hot, wet head. He pressed his hair with his hand, hard, so that the water ran down his face. Then he returned to bed. He closed his eyes, but that exploded fireworks in his brain. He sprang up and set his teeth and paced the length of the room, to and fro, to and fro, till his nerves were steady again and the rocking of the walls and floor ceased. His face con-

fronted him in the mirror. He stopped and bent down and regarded himself closely.

"What a wreck!" he exclaimed. "This sort of thing is playing the Dead March in *Saul* with my constitution. But, there, it's life!"

And he smiled complacently. He thought he was living because he thought he was dying.

He dressed himself in a suit of flannels and started to leave the room. On the threshold he faltered. He came back and took up the garments scattered over the bed. From every pocket he drew out a handful of coppers, with here and there a gold or silver piece. Smiling grimly, he went downstairs.

In the hall he stumbled over a mean little man, with a pallid, greasy face and red-rimmed eyes.

"Good mornin', sir," said the mean little man.

"Eh?"

"I'm the marker, sir. Last night, sir. Helped you upstairs, sir."

"Ah! And the Major?"

"Major, sir?"

"The gentleman I came down with, dined with, played billiards with. Which is his room?"

"Him, sir! O, the likes of him don't have no rooms here, not if we know it. HE's a reg'lar hanger-on, sir, he is. *We* know him. And as for his being a major! HE ain't no more a major than I am, sir."

John interrupted savagely.

"I know all about that. D'you think I'm a man to be imposed on by a bully rook?"

"No, sir, of course not, sir. O, you're a fly 'un you are! *I* know."

"Get me a glass of brandy and some soda."

"'Tain't my department, sir. I'm only the boot-boy and marker: pretty old for a boy, eh, sir? Yuss. Boot-boy up to twelve o'clock, sir—before then you marks for yourself, sir—and then marker till we lights out, sir. Besides, we're rather respectable, sir, and I don't think you'd get it, sir. But if you'll come with me, sir, to my room, sir, privit like, I think I could manage it for yer, sir."

"Get along. I'll come."

He drank two glasses of brandy and soda in the boot-boy's closet and then went out, smoking a cigar.

"What time breakfast?" he asked.

"*Derjenner* when yer like, sir," was the reply.

John walked rather shakily across the broad parade to the beach, and sat down on a rock that was fashioned in the rude likeness of a great armchair and leaned back his head on the cold stone, with his face turned upward to the sky. There he sat for an hour, that the fresh wind might blow away the last miasmas of debauch clogging his senses.

The thin rustle of a woman's dress aroused him from his torpor. He sat up and looked, and saw that the woman was Eva.

She saw him and stopped, uttering a little cry. He rose with trembling knees and went toward her, bareheaded. She gave him her hand without a word, smiling. He stooped and put his arm about her and kissed her on the lips. It was quickly done. And then they drew apart and stood, linked loosely together by the fingers, face to face.

"Eva!"

"John!"

He gave her his arm and they walked along the beach, slowly and in silence.

"You got my note, John?"

"Yes."

"Was it wrong of me? But, then, you asked."

"It was glorious of you. I would have come down before, but I have been ill."

"Ill! O, my poor boy!"

Her hand tightened on his arm and she looked up into his face with quick solicitude.

"I can see," she said. "You are paler, thinner. Your eyes are tired with pain."

"O, it wasn't much."

"My poor boy!"

"I believe you love me, Eva?"

"Yes, I do," she answered, simply.

"And I love you too. I ought to have said that first, perhaps."

It was clumsy and made her blush; but not just then. She was too full of joy to understand rightly at that moment.

"Let us sit down," said John,

"And watch the sea," said Eva.

They sat down and she nestled close to him. . . . .

It was noon when Eva burst in on Polly Weed. The old woman had grown very haggard with anxious waiting.

"I thought you 'ad gorn an' got drownded, I did," she said, crossly.

Eva kissed away her frowns.

"Why, what's come to the child?"

She caught Eva's wrists and tried to hold her off.

"Let me see what's in your face," she said.

But Eva clung to her, laughing and sobbing.

"No no," she said. "You must not. You must not. Let me hide it for a little while longer."

Polly Weed's ragged eyebrows lifted sharply.

"Ah-h-h!" she exclaimed.

"What does that mean?" asked Eva, raising her face from the old woman's withered breast.

"Never you mind," said Polly Weed. "Come an' 'ave a bite o' breakfast."

Eva sat down and turned over the food on her plate with her fork. She looked up and met Polly Weed's eyes.

"Well?" she said, pertly.

"I 'ope so, Miss Eva, I 'ope so," said the old woman, twitching her jaws. "But I 'ave me sore doubts."

"What a dolorous old thing it is!"

"I've lived over long to be gay, my dear. There ain't nothink like lonely years to rub the gilt off of this here gingerbready world."

"It's the gilt that's nasty," said Eva. "The gingerbread's all right, though stodgy. I don't want either. I am content with the things that are not of this world."

"Love an' sech-like, p'r'aps?"

Eva blushed.

"There ain't nothink earthier than love, Miss Eva."

"You mean the wrong sort."

"I mean the common sort. I ain't never seed no other."

"I believe you're a cynic, Polly!"

"I'm lots o' things that I don't understand, I dessay."

"You're an old dear!"

Polly Weed was disarmed.

"There, there, you git on wi' yere breakfas'," she said, lamely.

Eva made listless play with knife and fork for just two minutes.

"Whom do you think I met this morning?" she asked presently, looking up.

"That Mr. Coldershaw, I expec'."

"Don't say *that* Mr. Coldershaw. But how on earth did you guess? He should be in London."

"Yes, 'e *should* be!"

Eva rose, flushing angrily.

"You must not speak of him like that."

"Eh?"

"You have been very good to me, and I love you for it. But you must not speak of Mr. Coldershaw like that."

"There, there, there, my dear!" cried Polly. "I never meant no manner o' 'arm. Bless yer pritty dignity, I know, I know. Ain't I bin a woman meself?"

Eva, whose hauteur had been more than half assumed, melted at the words of the old woman.

"I love him so, I love him so," she murmured in apology.

"Ay, an' don't I know what that is, my dear? All the flutterin's an' the wonderful feelin's an' the little fears an' the maze of it! It's that as makes my 'eart sick like for ye, dear; you so young an' me so old."

"Age is not always a thing of years," said Eva. "You are not so very old, Polly."

"We gits old in our bad times, ye mean, an' oh, 'ow true that is! But mine's been nearly all bad times, dear. There ain't bin many good 'uns fer me. It was the wrong 'and as I tetched at the startin', an' it led me away from joy altogether. Ah-h-h! No, no! Though yere lips is like honey for sweetness an' yere touch is medicine, it is. Pray God they're wi' me both when my time comes. But it's ye that's cryin' through my eyes, not me, not me!"

"He is so good and great, dear. You would have loved him."

"'E's all that; yes, yes. An' 'e need be!"

"He was kind to poor father at the first."

"It was a good deed, I allow, little girl. 'Is desarts is 'igh, no doubt, but 'is reward is 'igher."

"Oh, Polly!"

"All of a tremble like, ain't it?"

"You will love him, too, Polly."

"For yere sake I will."

"It will be for his own sake, never fear, afterwards."

"Yes, yes?"

"He is so strong. Men are so strong, aren't they Polly?"

The old woman puckered her eyes.

"Ye're over ready to order the world in clumps, my dear. That's yere innocence. But nothink's true o' anythink an' nothink's false."

"Now I will eat my breakfast."

"The fast was long enough, in conscience, to need breakin'."

"I'm so happy, Polly."

"Well, well! But love's a thinnin' diet, my dear."

Afterwards they went out on the parade above the beach and there met John Coldershaw.

"This is Mrs. Weed, John," said Eva.

He appraised the old woman in a glance and threw her a careless nod.

"Mrs. Weed has been so good to me, such a dear, kind friend."

John looked at her again.

"How do, Mrs. Weed?" he said.

Eva was slightly shocked.

"You don't understand, John," she said. "I *love* Mrs. Weed; I want you to feel to her as I do."

He put out his hand.

"Delighted to know you," he said, with an affectation of weary boredom. "Hope you are quite well. And Mr. Weed too. And all your relations."

The old woman made a low obeisance.

"Thankee, sir, kindly," she murmured.

"Nonsense!" exclaimed Eva, laughing. "Mr. Coldershaw doesn't want that sort of thing—do you John?"

"Eh?" said John. "No; of course not. That's all right, my good woman. You needn't curtsey to me."

"Take Mr. Coldershaw's arm," said Eva, "and try to look as if you were his mother."

"Oh, I say, you know," whispered John.

Eva's mouth hardened. He saw and understood her better in that instant. There was rock in her. He offered his arm in all humility, but Polly Weed refused it.

"Yes," said Eva.

"Please," said John.

"Ye're too tall," said Polly. "It would be a sore discomfort to the both of us. Let me jog along by myself. Yes, Miss Eva, let me."

Eva yielded, and they walked on thus.

At first Eva talked to the old woman across John; but soon her lover absorbed her whole attention, and she forgot Polly with the easy, cruel forgetfulness of happy youth.

They traversed the length of the parade and then retraced their steps. Half-way back they encountered a man and woman, walking arm-in-arm, who cried out at sight of John and hailed him by name. The man, wizened, effete of expression, was dressed with elaborate negligence; the woman was a work of art.

A scowl darkened John's brow at sight of them. He would have passed on with the merest gesture of recognition, but they blocked his path.

"My dear, *dear* Jack!" said the woman, extending a delicately gloved hand.

"My sweet, exotic youth, my cherry, merry Coldershaw, how are you?" said the man.

"How do?" responded John, curtly. "You'll excuse me——?"

"You are your own excuse always," said the man. "Besides, I'm affecting the same unconventional garb, myself. These dreadful unconventions, eh? We salt of the earth must observe them, though."

Eva, her hand still clutching John's sleeve, though timidly, stood staring and listening.

"My dear Jack," said the woman, loudly. "The—er—the lady?"

John bit his lip in savage impotence.

"As a victim myself I feel that I have a right to insist—and I do."

"Of course; yes, yes," said the man.

John drew Eva forward. "Miss Hardrop. Eva, these are two friends of mine, Miss Du Cane, Mr. Wyber."

Eva bowed with an access of pretty dignity that surprised John and pleased him. Mr. Wyber flourished his hat and murmured unintelligibly. But Hetty came forward and took her hand with a great appearance of warm-heartedness.

"You go on ahead. Miss Hardrop and I want to talk," she said, waving aside the men.

John stood irresolute, but Wyber took his arm and drew him forward. The ladies followed. Mrs. Polly Weed seized the opportunity to run away. And Eva did not miss her.

"No, no," said John, stopping suddenly. "You must precede us."

"Very well, dragon?" said Hetty, archly. "Isn't he sweet?" she asked Eva, as the procession re-formed.

Eva bent her head and did not answer.

"I ought to hate you intensely," continued Hetty; "but, somehow, I cannot. You are sweet, too."

Eva met her gaze with calm, passionless eyes and asked:

"Why should you hate me?"

"Oh, my *dear!*" murmured Hetty.

"I don't understand," said Eva.

"Really, you are too ingenuous!"

Eva quickened her pace.

"The sea looks very beautiful, don't you think, she said. "I love the sea."

"Rogue!" cried Hetty, playfully. "No, no, my dear. It won't do. And, after all, why should you? We understand one another."

"I'm afraid we don't—quite," said Eva.

"I understand *you*, my dear, perfectly."

Eva flushed slightly and her lip curled.

"It is curious how inconsequent we are," began Hetty, after a pause.

"It is, very," Eva agreed. And they both laughed.

"What a needle you are!" Hetty cried.

John Coldershaw overtook them.

"Wyber is dying to hear the joke," he said.

"What joke?" asked Hetty, winking at Eva.

"You were laughing?"

"My dear Jack, we were laughing at *me*. There was no joke, unless I am one."

"You! Certainly not," said John. "I beg your pardon."

He slipped round to Eva's side.

"No, no," said Hetty," go back. I won't have poor, dear Mr. Wyber neglected in this way. Besides——"

At this juncture, Mr. Wyber put in an inopportune appearance at Hetty's elbow. Hetty frowned and laughed and, after a momentary hesitation, took his arm. Eva had already taken John's arm.

A mood of silence fell on the little party. Mr. Wyber broke it with an allusion to "the wild, round head of sea and its curled tresses." Thereupon, there was a brisk interchange of random commonplaces.

At last, they parted.

"We may see you again to-morrow," said Hetty, as she tripped away, leaning on the poet's arm.

"Yes," said John; "I hope so."

"Well?" said Wyber to Hetty.

"I shall go back to-morrow."

"Eh?"

"I feel that it isn't worth while: that *he* isn't worth while. And the girl is so impossible, not at all the sort of girl I expected."

"She's pretty."

"Yes, and clever. What a fool that Underton was! From his description of her I thought she was a girl to shrivel up and die like a dropped leaf."

"I believe you like her."

"I respect her. I shall leave her alone. Besides, I believe I am sick of the whole thing. He looked such a cur, didn't he?"

"I like curs, rather."

"I hope she may get him."

"You could wish her no worse."

"I believe you're a bit jealous of him, old man?"

"Jealousy is the outward and visible sign of an infinitesimal mind. I am incapable of it."

"You are a man of wonderful incapabilities, aren't you? No, no, I would be spared any more boneless epigrams, just at present, thanks. Come and buy me something pretty."

Eva dropped John's arm as soon as the Poet and the Peri were beyond view. He looked at her with troubled eyes.

"Let us come away from all this crowd," she said, speaking hurriedly. "Let us climb that shoulder of rock—right over there. I want to talk to you."

"Won't you take my arm?" he asked.

"I prefer not, thank you."

"I hope I haven't offended you in any way?"

She ignored this quite inadequate appeal for mercy and they strode along the parade. Their sleeves touched, but they were very wide apart.

The aspect of the scene was altered. There were too many vulgar people, too many coarse, garish houses and shops and hotels. The beach was crude and ugly. The old stone breakwater was the most hideous thing under heaven. How brazen was the sun! how monotonous the shifting, slipping sea! how foul the breeze! All was changed. There was nothing of beauty left in anything. Eva chewed the dry husks of memory and her tongue grew bitter.

They climbed the shoulder of rock and came upon a flat tract of white beach that was quite deserted. Once the stones on which they trod had formed the bed of ocean; but slowly the sea had receded and left them for the sun to bleach. The sun was bleaching them now; its hard, pale glare exhausted the vision. There was no shade anywhere. The hot stillness affected Eva with a sense of faintness and fatigue. She reeled slightly. John put out a hand but she struck it away. They stood, awkwardly silent, side by side.

"Who was that woman?" asked Eva, in a slow, dry voice, and she turned her face to his.

He would have lied, but for the scorn of her eyes. He stood, with drooping head, before her, and could find no word wherewith to answer. He dared not to meet her gaze, even.

Her fingers played desperately with the folds of her dress.

"Say something," she cried, hoarsely. "For God's sake, say something."

"What can I say? You have condemned me already."

She turned away, and he ventured to raise his head. He heard the catch of her breath, and thought she was crying. His foot slipped on a stone and, at the sound, she wheeled and confronted him. Her eyes held his gaze. No; she was not crying. Her face was very white and hard; her eyes were bright; her lips, firm. He felt that had it been night he could have conquered her. But the strong sun

was searching his very soul. He knew he was naked before her, that she understood him. She compelled his admiration and respect. He felt shame and swore within himself that, losing her or winning her, he would be a better man in the future. It was a mood.

"Don't be too hard on me, Eva," he whispered.

She did not hear the words, but she understood that he was sorry and implored her forgiveness. Her heart softened toward him, and she had to stand very still and clench her hands very hard to keep back her tears. Not a muscle of her face moved. Thus they stood for what seemed a great time. Something of the old gay glamour in which his image had grown up in her heart . . . . the glamour that the afternoon had so cruelly dispelled . . . . re-settled on him. He was very much a man in spite of his deficiencies . . . . perhaps it was because of them. He did not whine or bluster. He had sinned and he was taking his punishment quietly. Thus her love pleaded for him.

"I've been an awful brute," he said. "I can't ask you to forgive me, I suppose?"

A better man would have said something more—with less effect. He did not know it, but his own clumsy helplessness was all in his favour. Men have no better advocates than the women they have injured.

Her silence stunned him. He could say no more. He held out his hand.

She looked at it and laughed softly and sobbed.

"Good-by," she said.

A tiny cloud crossed the path of the sun and it was dark. The gleam died out of the sea and the white stones of the beach turned grey in an instant. Eva shivered.

She let fall his hand. His arm dropped limply and he walked slowly away.

She stood watching him with a face that seemed graven in stone. Once she started forward, but he did not know. Then she cried out, and he came running back. He halted at a distance of several paces from her. She went forward.

"Give me your hand again," she said.

He felt that the moment was his to seize. But his newborn awe of her was too strong. He had dwindled in his own eyes and she had grown tall.

"We may never see each other again," she began, and

at the thought the tears swam. She blinked them away, but he saw them clotting her lashes. "Let me assure you that you have my forgiveness. It may make your way easier at points in your life."

She stopped.

"Thank you," he said.

She gave him her hand again.

"There was something else," she said; "but I cannot say it now. Perhaps I will write."

Her heart was temporising with her conscience, and she knew it. Once more he left her. He slowly climbed the shoulder of rock and descended on the other side. She craned her neck that she might prolong her last view of him. And when he was gone she still gazed.

The horrid yellow sun was blazing down again. The sea was flashing. A little boat heavy with passengers—men and women in gay attire—darted from behind some rocks and plunged out to sea. The light laughter of the people in it came to her, and she felt that she was going mad.

She ran up the steep shoulder of rock, crying out, "John, John!"

He had thrown himself down on a heap of shingle only a few yards away. He lifted his face at the sound of her voice, and rose and ran to her and took her to his breast. And she forgave him and surrendered herself to him utterly. He kissed away her tears.

"Be very good and tender with me, John," she said, wistfully.

CHAPTER XVII

POLLY WEED walked home sadly, her head heavy with thought, her grim, grey face quivering. She entered in at the door of the little cottage with a slow step, and sat her down before the fire in the trim parlour, and cried.

Eva found her there when she returned in the twilight.

"Why, Polly!" she exclaimed, at sight of the old woman's face.

"I've only been crying," said Polly. "It's got to be a sort o' habit with me."

Eva kissed her, but said no word, and went over to the window and sat down there.

"I wish," she said presently, speaking very wistfully, "I wish I had a mother, Polly."

Polly remained silent.

"Life is so big and difficult," said the girl. "And we are such fools. I am such a fool. I feel as if a cool hand on my forehead might prove my salvation now. As it is, I am dragged and hustled and hurried and borne along, and I get no time to think. I cannot stop. There is a tide bearing me. I am like a straw in a sluice, and the sluice is all life. Everything is hurrying on, and beyond there is a shelving verge and a plunge and—and . . . . What is beyond that? You, perhaps, could tell me, Polly, for you are old, and your tears have washed your eyes clean."

"My dear——" said Polly Weed, rising hastily.

"No, no," cried Eva. "Sit down. Don't come near me. Don't tell me. I would rather not know. These things are to be. There is the verge and here am I, a straw in the sluice. Your hand cannot hold me. And my mother is dead!"

Polly sat down beside the trembling girl, and took her in her arms.

"It's hard to say the right word to ye, dear," she murmured; "but I'm thinking it. Put your head here, on my

heart, little one. An old woman's wiseness is overmuch like milk that is sour wi' keeping. Go right forward, Eva, and be simple. There is a special providence for simple hearts."

"He has been telling me about himself," said Eva, after a pause. "Of his hopes and ambitions. He told me about his parents, too."

"Yes, yes, to be sure," said Polly.

"I don't think his parents understand him quite."

"It seems a hard saying, my dear."

"*He* did not say it. I merely infer this from his words. Indeed, he was very reticent. He promises to tell me more about them some day, in the future, when—when we are married."

Polly Weed started up, gasping.

"Eh?" she cried.

"He pleaded so hard to be allowed to take care of me. 'You are so little and weak and lonely,' he said. 'Let me protect you and provide for you.' He loves me and he thinks I am poor. 'I have not much,' he said, 'but sufficient for a little while, and it will be my pride and privilege to work for you.' Could I refuse, Polly?"

"It seems over-hasty, my dear, that's all."

"Why should we wait? He says, why should we wait? 'I can work with a better heart if you are always by to help and encourage me,' he said. O, Polly, don't damp us. He is so chivalrous. I feel sure that I can help him, can influence him to noble ends. He is marrying me for myself. He pities me and loves me. He wants to have the right to work for me and cherish me. I am glad to go to him, doubly glad because I know, what he does not, that I shall be able to help him. He thinks to have a portionless girl for a wife. And I am not that. He will be disappointed to find me rich, he is so generous and full of self-sacrifice. He is, Polly, he is. Even you cannot doubt that. Polly, Polly, help me, be kind to me. Tell me I am doing right in taking him. I feel so . . . . there was another woman, a bad, wicked creature . . . . It was because he was young and inexperienced. His mother might have saved him from that. It is so dreadful, so sad to think that there is such little sympathy between them. He is giving it all up. He cannot be anything but good and noble. But I wish—I wish . . . ."

Her incoherent outburst ended in a storm of tears and sobs.

"There, there, little one," cried Polly, and rocked her on her breast with all a mother's tenderness.

"This is to be the last word," said Eva. "It will be better not to speak of it any more. It is traitorous to doubt him. I have promised and I will not go back. His future depends on me, I am sure. He is very lonely. And, then, men are so different. They do not think. Polly, you would do the same, wouldn't you, if you were me?"

"We all go with our hearts: it's our infirmity."

"You would do the same?"

"I would, being a woman, but I wouldn't be thinking of the afterwards."

"It is best not to. The present is the only time that is ours. We must live in that. We must not think of the future. That is God's. The past will give us a crutch when we fall lame or are in doubt. But that is not much. And we had best keep our gaze up."

She rose and paced the room, feverishly.

"There's a devil of unrest in me," she said. "I can't explain, but it drives me and tortures me. I want not to think. I want to drift with the tide and not struggle. What is the use? I must go forward. Nothing ever stops, and I cannot. Yet I fret, and my thoughts fly, and there is no peace." She sat down. "Hold my hands, Polly. I am tossed and riven, and I never grow tired. I would sleep, if I could, and never wake. Hold me, hold me! I have lost my clutch on things."

Polly took her outstretched hands and held them. Eva bent her gaze to the floor.

"I am better now," she said, at last.

The landlady of the house bustled in with tea, and they sat down at the table to eat and drink. It was a poor farce, but neither made comment on the other's lack of appetite.

"I am going out for a walk, Polly," said Eva.

"Alone?"

"I should prefer it."

"Perhaps you're going to meet HIM?"

"No; I want to see a lot of sky, that's all."

She took her bonnet and shawl and went out. She turned away from the sea: a spirit of unrest was on that, too;

and walked across the grey country. There were ghosts abroad, in the bushes and trees, silently contemplative, lurking under heavy, black thatches, flying with the wind along the dusty lanes. A shimmer of silver was in the air.

She walked along under the drooping branches, and, skirting the base of a hill, came suddenly upon a church. It was a little church ; from the roof of it a disproportionate steeple shot up into the sky to serve for a landmark to mariners passing over the sea. The windows were golden with light from within. Eva drew near to the porch. A sound of singing came to her, blent with the rich music of an organ. The voices that sang were young and sweet and strong, cleaving the twilight. Eva was drawn. She stood and listened.

"*I stretch forth my hands unto Thee; my soul gaspeth unto Thee as a thirsty land.*

"*Hear me, O Lord, and that soon, for my spirit waxeth faint ; hide not Thy face from me, lest I be like unto them that go down into the pit.*

"*O, let me hear Thy loving kindness betimes in the morning, for in Thee is my trust ; show Thou me the way that I should walk in, for I lift up my soul unto Thee.*"

She drew nearer, her lips murmuring the familiar, comfortable words, to the slow music of the singing.

"*Teach me to do the thing that pleaseth Thee, for Thou art my God ; let Thy loving Spirit lead me forth into the land of righteousness.*

"*Quicken me, O Lord, for Thy Name's sake ; and for Thy righteousness' sake bring my soul out of trouble.*"

"Bring my soul out of trouble," Eva prayed.

Then followed the doxology. Eva went in under the little porch and sat down on a rough bench at the back of the church. Two old women shared the bench with her. They were feeble and snuffy, and did not rise to praise God ; but they bent their stiff knees when the time came for prayer ; and closed their eyes and clasped their withered hands with full reverence. Doubtless their hearts were more attuned to supplication than to song.

The congregation was small. A sparse crop of heads showed above the backs of the pews—grey heads and

golden, side by side. The gas was lowered for economy's sake, so that the light was dim and uncertain. The minister was an old, old man, with wandering hands and a hollow, broken voice. His words were too weakly uttered to reach Eva, but she was content to look at him, for he was, in his person, a better sermon than any he could preach, being, indeed, but a simple man of gentle spirit, with no power to speak, but only perfect faith and great love to aid him to do God's work in the world. And looking from him to the poor folk in their fustian, so bowed with heavy toil and pinched with want, yet so strong in their childlike piety, ignorant even of the existence of doubt—seeing them gathered together there to thank a universal Father for His poor gifts and scanty mercies, Eva felt that here in the sight of these people was something stronger than influence of mortal mind, something to cling to and rest on.

She left the church lifted up, exalted, with her path clear before her and a heart at rest.

END OF SECOND STAGE

Third Stage

Wedlock

CHAPTERS XVIII–XXVII

CHAPTER XVIII

WEST of Chelsea there is a district that was once much affected by people with small, but not insufficient incomes, and large, artistic sympathies. Harmless revolutionaries lived there, paying their taxes and loving their wives with the worst of us; and self-acknowledged geniuses; and enthusiastic youths who had hardly realised themselves; and actors and actresses, who were not quite respectable, though wonderfully good-humoured and childish; and people who loved the river, which is a healthy love; and many others whom it would be alike ungracious and unnecessary to classify. It was a pretty district, healthily old. The houses in it might have been built by the people who lived in them, they were so haphazard and picturesque. All day long and very often in the night, too, music and pictures and books were made in these houses. And on Sundays the local church was filled with shock heads and bad millinery; but the singing was good and strong.

On an evening in the red autumn two women sat in the kitchen of one of the houses in this Bohemian neighbourhood. A huge fire burned in the shining range, for the weather was inclement. One of the women was Polly Weed, the other was a buxom girl with a round, red face and wide eyes, holding in their expression a large capacity for astonishment. Both were attired as domestics, in lace caps, print dresses, and aprons.

"And so, my dear, you gave him up," said Polly.

"Yes," said the girl, "I gave him up. But it was cruel hard. For I was real fond o' him. And he was the handsomest young man in the world—such eyes!"

"Ah, my dear," said Polly, shaking her head, sagely. "That is a very common variety of young man, that is."

"But he really was."

"I'm not doubting it, my dear."

"I says to him, 'I've done with you,' I says. 'You're

false,' I says. 'And it's only my little bit o' money as you're after.' (Fifty pounds in the Funns as my pore dear aunty lef' me.) He coloured up like. 'Very well,' he says, 'if you like to think so, well and good,' he says. 'But you're doing me a wicked injustice,' he says. 'No, I ar'n't,' I says. 'D'you think I can't see through your moguing ways?' I says. He laughed and twiddled his moustache—such a lovely one, golden! We had a few more words. O, he was a cruel one! And then we parted. Mother says, when I told her, 'I've jest had a letter from my cousin Polly to London,' she says, 'with a offer of a nice situation for you,' she says. 'If I was you, gel,' she says, 'I should take it and get out of the way of temptation.' So I did, and glad I am, too."

"Quite right, quite right," said Polly. "It's always safest to run away when your heart is soft to him as you're at odds with. I hope he don't know where you are?"

The girl blushed.

"Well, you see," she said, "I—I didn't like not to give him no chance o' righting hisself. That would ha' been onchristianlike, so I jest dropped him word that in case he should give his heart to God at any time he might tell me and I'd try to forgive him for his sin to me."

"Tut, tut!" cried Polly. "Well, well! But we're a pore spirited lot at best, and we can't run away from our natures, I suppose. Give us a man and you give us a chance to make fools of oursel's that we're not over-likely to miss. And we're all alike, the best and the wust on us. I'm sorry you wrote to him or give him word where you were, my dear. It was silly."

"I was that onsettled in my mind!"

Polly shook her head again, very mournfully, and stooped to lift the poker.

"I knew a young gel, once," she said, slowly raking between the bars of the grate; "she was about your age, but quite a lady and that clever you wouldn't believe. And pretty, too, bless you, pretty as a tiny baby's laugh. And kind, too, with it all. She was poor and had a drunken father to keep, but she give away more than money to us humble folk as knew her; she give us bright smiles when bright smiles was scarce among us; and kind words to help us on and sympathy: things you can't put no price on,

because you can't buy 'em, only wi' love. And when we was ill or in trouble she would come into our houses and sit by our beds and talk to us about everything except death, and take our children on her lap and kiss them and play wi' them, not a-looking out for lice and fever all the time, with a smelling-bottle to her nose, but hearty and free, so as you couldn't tell she was different from us, except by her goodness. She was pertickler good to one poor old woman. This old woman had only one other friend in the world; and that friend was her worst enemy—gin. And she wouldn't ha' took to that but for the onkindness of her children and the hardness of her life. Well, this young lady was real good to the old woman, so good that the pore creature ached to show her gratitude. You know the feeling, Lizzie?"

"Ah!" said the girl.

"At last, one day," Polly continued, "the old woman got a chance to show her gratitude. The young lady's father died, and the young lady herself got very ill, so ill the doctor thought, once or twice, she was going to die. But the old woman as she had been kind to nursed her, and sat up with her, and fended for her, day and night. She couldn't get tired, with that lovely face always afore her, and when she did she went to sleep in a chair, so as to be handy for waking up. And the old woman prayed to God, and though it hurt her to kneel, because of her rheumatiz, she always went down on her knees to do it, hoping that God would take the pain she was going through into consideration, and to prove to Him as there wasn't no sham about it. There ain't no better test o' piety than rheumatiz in the knees."

The girl looked up with a slightly shocked expression; she was kneeling over the fender, brushing up the ashes.

Polly continued: "To make a long story short, I may as well say at once the young lady did get better. And O! how pleased her friends was. There was a reg'lar crowd round the door all day, and I used to have to go down and tell 'em how things was every now and then, or they'd ha' been banging at the door of the sickroom, they was that anxious. I was like them telegrams they stick up on the Mansion House, in the City, my dear, quite as important as them, I was. And one day a' old gentleman come up to tell the young lady as she was very rich, which I'd

always knew she must be sooner or later. For she wasn't our class at all. And the *next* day there was a man after her. I ain't saying anything agin him. He was nearly a gentleman, as near as he could get and still miss it, and he hadn't no inkling—he couldn't have had, it being all so private—about the young lady coming into a fortune. Besides, he knew her before the old lawyer-gentleman came to tell us about it. So I suppose he was in love with her —in his man's way, which is a different way from ours. And she was terribly in love with him. She used to lay a-thinking of him all day, when he sent her flowers, which he did sometimes. *I* knew, as well as if she was thinking out loud, what was in her sweet, kind heart. And it hurt me to see it. Well, they courted. The young lady went down to the seaside when she was well enough, and my lord followed. The old woman was there, too, but she didn't count. They never took no notice of her when they was together, but let her walk along by their side or go away, or fall down dead, or anything. And then the young lady found out something dreadful about him. I don't know exactly what it was, but it nearly sent her mad for a bit. She raved and cried, and was all mazed with doubt and fear, and love of him on the top of it. I prayed she might give him up. But she never. She knew she was wrong in taking him. She tried to argue it out, and that was proof positive. When a woman argues she's generally made up her mind to do something foolish, and there's an end of it. What weighed most with her was his not knowing she was rich; for she hadn't told him."

"He must ha' loved her, then," cried the girl, interrupting suddenly.

Polly laughed.

"P'r'aps he did," she said. "I hope so, I'm sure. Well, they arranged to get married, and the young lady come up to London and bought a house and furnished it, all unbeknown to him, and went back to the seaside, where he was staying all the time, and married him there in plain black by special licence, at a quiet old country church, with only the old woman and a wormy sexton as witnesses. The old woman was sent up to London to look after the house, and the young lady and her husband went away to spend the honeymoon in furrin parts."

"And was they happy?" asked the girl.

"I don't know," said Polly. "That was the last I heard of 'em. As yet, they've only been married a month."

The girl sprang up and clapped her hands.

"I know who it is!" she cried.

"Eh?" Polly asked.

"Why, the young lady is missus, and the husband is master. Do he know yet that she is rich?"

"She was to tell him when they got abroad."

"And when are they coming back?"

"To-day or to-morrow. It depends on the trains and the ships."

The girl looked at Polly with her wide eyes, and rubbed her nose reflectively.

There was a long, tense silence.

CHAPTER XIX

POLLY WEED and the girl sat over the fire till the evening was far advanced, starting up and crying "Hush!" whenever a vehicle rattled past in the street or a footstep sounded on the flags of the echoing pavement.

"They won't come to-night," Polly said, at last. "We'd better have a bit of supper and get to bed, I'm thinking."

The girl yawned and stretched and rose with watery eyes to make preparation for the meal. She was thus engaged when a cab drew up at the door and a volley of knocks thundered through the house.

"That's her!" cried Polly, and hobbled away upstairs. The girl followed slowly.

Polly opened the door and peered into the darkness.

"Is it you, dear?" she asked, doubtfully.

Eva came forward out of the night with a wild rush and embraced her passionately.

"My dear, nasty, horrid, old Weedlekins!" she cried, punctuating the words with kisses. "My own, sweet, cynical Polly."

"And how is my deary one?"

"So glad to get home to you, Polly. So tired with foreign places and faces. England is the jewel: all the world is only a setting. 'There's no place like home,' Polly. I never want to go away from it again."

The street-door slammed, and John Coldershaw entered the hall.

"Come, come, Eva," he said.

"Yes, dear," said Eva, releasing Polly.

"I've no doubt Mrs. Weed has a lot of things to do," said John. "There's a supper to prepare, and beds to be aired, and so on. Eh, Mrs. Weed? How d'you do, Mrs. Weed?"

"Nicely, sir, thankee," said Polly, dropping a curtsey.

"Who's this young woman?" asked John, indicating the girl, Lizzie, with a gloved finger.

"My cousin Martha's eldest, sir," said Polly. "Lizzie Glint her name is."

"One of the domestics, eh? Well, bustle her, Mrs. Weed."

Eva went forward and took the girl's hand.

"You come from Beemanstowe, in Gloucestershire, don't you, my dear?" she asked.

"Yes 'm," said Lizzie.

"You must feel strange in this great London."

"Yes 'm."

"I hope you will be comfortable with me and tell me things. You have a mother at home, haven't you? I am sorry it was through me you left her."

"Come, Eva," said John, tapping his boot with his cane impatiently.

"Yes, dear," said Eva.

She left the girl and went to her husband's side.

"Where is there a fire, Mrs. Weed?" asked John.

"Only in the kitchen, sir."

"What a damned nuisance! You should have seen to it. I'm as cold as a frog. Light a fire at once, will you, please, and cook something hot. . . . . Is your cousin Martha's eldest deaf, Mrs. Weed?"

Lizzie Glint, who had been standing as if carved in stone, with her great eyes fixed on John Coldershaw's face, flushed at the words, and disappeared at once down the kitchen stairs.

"I'll see to it, sir," said Polly, meekly, and followed in her train.

John turned to Eva, laughing peevishly.

"Ugh!" he said, shivering. "Well, what shall we do? Go down to the kitchen?"

"Let me take you over the house," said Eva. "I have wanted you to see it all the time we were away. I furnished it myself. I ordered the things and Polly knocked the tradespeople down. There's a special room for you, with a cunning little table in it, and . . . . But perhaps you would rather wait till to-morrow?"

"Yes; I'm too beastly tired now to look at furniture. I wonder if there's any brandy in the house?"

Eva's manner became subdued. The light died from her face.

"What's the matter?" asked John. "I really am too tired to go over the house to-night. And the things can wait, you know."

"Yes, dear," said Eva.

"If you're going to make a grievance of it," said John, laughing irritably, "I'll look at the things now, of course. But I should much prefer to wait. How shall we start?—with the drawing-room?"

"It doesn't matter, John," said Eva. "As you say, the things can wait."

"You might ask about the brandy," said John. "There isn't any left in my flask, I know."

Eva called down the stairs, "Have you any brandy in the house, Polly?"

The voice of Polly, strangely subdued and husky, replied:

"Yes, Mrs. Coldershaw. I got some in this morning."

Eva started. Her face took on an expression of keen distress.

"The poor, dear old thing is crying," she whispered to John.

"I don't like this," said John, not heeding her. "What do the servants want with spirits?"

"O, John, I must go down to her," said Eva, not heeding him, in her turn. "Think of the poor, old dear crying!"

"Let her cry and be damned!" said John, angrily. "They're often like that when they have brandy in in the morning."

"That's very unkind," said Eva. Her lip quivered and she turned away.

"Are we going to hang about in this draughty hall for ever?" John asked. "Can't that woman hurry up and light a fire?"

"Come in here," said Eva, pushing open a door. "This is the dining-room."

John struck a match and set it to the gas.

"Ah," he said, looking about, wearily. "Not so bad. But what terribly dark furniture you have chosen."

"It looks lighter in the daytime," Eva faltered.

John rang the bell. Lizzie Glint appeared with the brandy and glasses.

"Will you have the fire in here, sir?" she asked.

"Of course! Where else should I have it?"

He poured out some brandy and drank it.

"Will you have some?" he asked Eva.

"No, thank you, dear."

"What damned nonsense!" he exclaimed. "You must have some. I'm sure you want it. You look as cold and miserable as a barmaid in the morning."

He poured out a second glassful of brandy and handed it to her.

"I should like some water," she said.

"It will do you more good taken neat. Go on, drink it up. It gives me the fidgets to see you looking at it."

He poured out a second glass for himself.

"Well!" he said, "here's luck to the devil!" And he tossed the golden fire down his throat. "I wish to God we had a few jolly people here to liven things up," he grumbled. He doffed his coat and handed it to Lizzie Glint, who had just risen from lighting the fire. "Give your mistress a hand with her things," he said. And went over and sat down with his feet on the fender.

"This is better," he said, stretching out his hands to the leaping flames. "Come over and warm yourself, too, Eva."

He dragged forward a chair for her. She sat down beside him. Lizzie Glint went out, shutting the door softly.

"Now give me a kiss and be jolly," said John, putting his arm about Eva's waist, and drawing her head down on his shoulder. "Come now, say something bright. Make me laugh. You generally have the knack."

Instead, Eva burst into tears and buried her face against his coat. He frowned, and loosed his arm from her waist.

"No, no," she cried, catching at his hand and drawing his arm tight about her again. "Don't be cross with me. Be kind to me, John. I'm only tired and cold."

"What a queer little woman you are," he remarked, moodily. He passed his hand over her hair, and curled one errant tress about his finger.

"You have awfully pretty hair, Eva," he said, carelessly.

She reached up her hands with a caressing gesture, and clasped them behind his head.

"Do you really think it pretty, John?" she whispered.

"Prettier than anybody else's? I want you to think I am pretty."

He was surprised at her vehemence and laughed.

"What do you imagine I married you for?" he asked. "I think you're a damned handsome girl. All the fellows at that Swiss place thought so, too. There wasn't a man in the hotel who didn't envy me. They were all dying to be introduced."

"They didn't matter," breathed Eva. "I only want you to like my face."

"I shouldn't like it if no other fellow did. That is the whole idea of marriage: to possess a woman everybody else wants, and flaunt her in the face of all the disappointed ones. It's what a man looks for when he gives up his freedom."

"But if I became old and ugly, John?"

"Don't talk about becoming old and ugly, Eva. There's plenty of time for that, I hope, ten years hence. And I think you're the sort of girl to wear well."

"Wear well?"

"'Sounds like a brand of boots, doesn't it! Some women, you know, get awfully blousy and faded after a year or so of wedded bliss. It's jolly rough on the husbands, I always think."

"And on the wives, too, John."

"O, women don't care after they've got a man. It's the poor devils of fellows who suffer. Everybody thinks, 'What a fool he must have been to marry *her!*'"

"What beasts some men must be!"

"Eh? Not at all, my dear girl. You don't understand us, that's all. I think we've a right to look for beauty in our wives."

"And when the beauty fades?"

"To look for it in other men's wives." He laughed. "Of course, that's only my joke," he said. "*I* shouldn't do it. I wonder when we are going to get anything to eat?"

"Shall I ring again?"

"Never mind. No, put your head where it was before. You've got such peaches for cheeks, and there's a smell about your hair I like. I suppose, Eva, you had a lot of fellows after you before I came along?"

"None that mattered."

"I suppose eligible young men were rather scarce in your awful neighbourhoood. But it is a precious poor compliment to me all the same. I think it improves a girl to have one or two flirtations before she settles down to married life. It adds a rare piquancy to her charms. It rounds off her angles, so to speak."

"Have I many angles, John?"

He laughed. "You want to make it a personal matter, eh? But I won't satisfy you on that head. And, after all, angles or no angles, you've got me. . . . Ha, here's supper at last. You carve, my dear. It's such a fag."

They sat down at a corner of the table.

"Shall I stay to help with the things, 'm?" asked Lizzie Glint.

"No; it doesn't matter," said Eva.

"Yes, stay," said John. "I hate to have to stop to ring when I'm hungry."

The girl withdrew to a corner, standing to attention with wide eyes and pursed lips.

"I think I shall make it a rule to have no talking when we eat alone together," said John. "I hate talking at meals. It's such a waste of time, and such a nuisance, too. Pass me the bread. I give you my word I never had half enough at those *table d'hôte* affairs, where everybody jabbered, jabbered, jabbered, all the time. I suppose there is no wine in the house?"

"No, sir," answered Lizzie.

"I must rub along on brandy, then. Will you have some, too, Eva?"

"There is a little left of my last glass."

"A little! Good God, I don't believe you touched it. Well, more luck to the devil!"

"Oh, sir!" cried Lizzie Glint, involuntarily, and then trembled and bit her lip.

"Eh?" laughed John. "What was that? Don't they drink to the devil in Beemanstowe?"

"John!" murmured Eva.

He laughed again and re-filled his glass.

He ate a great deal, and, despite his taboo, talked a great deal. Eva sat and listened and laughed when she could, and did not cry when she might. He lighted a cigar at the table, still keeping the girl in attendance: her rigidity of muscle was remarkable.

At last he rose with a yawn and flung the stub of his cigar into the grate.

"Hullo! Still here?" he said, suddenly catching sight of Lizzie Glint. "I thought you had gone to bed ages ago."

"Good-night 'm. Good-night, sir," said the girl, and withdrew.

"I wish you had let her go away at first," said Eva. "It would have been ever so much cosier, and I could have waited on you."

"It's best to work 'em, my dear. They get fat and lazy else."

"We can talk now, instead," said Eva. "I have a lot to say to you and to hear. And this midnight time is so jolly, with the dying fire and the murmur without that seems to make the silence more intense——"

"Thank you, my dear," said John; "but I would rather go to bed. I should go to sleep, anyway."

"I will come up presently," said Eva. "I want to look at the fire and think a bit."

"Good-night," said he, kissing her.

"Good-night," said she.

He went out, calling to Lizzie Glint to show him to his room, and presently blundered up the stairs. The sound of his tread on the floor above echoed through the house for a space; then it ceased, and there was quiet.

Eva sat down on the great fur hearthrug and looked into the fire. The red glow suffused her face with a pale flush and touched with a finger of glory her wonderful hair. Her eyes were sad with doubt, and her form drooped. She was sitting thus when Polly Weed entered the dining-room in search of her. The old woman stood in the doorway, unobserved, looking down at the little figure. Once she made a step forward. The little figure, down there in the straying firelight, did not stir. A gang of noisy roysterers passed under the window; Eva shrugged her shoulders and uttered a harsh, tiny laugh.

Polly Weed raised a palsied hand to her eyes and went out very softly, so softly that Eva did not know she had been there.

CHAPTER XX

In the days before they were wedded John had talked to Eva, very vain-gloriously, of the work he was going to do in the world of art. He had to pretend, then, that he did not know of her fortune; he did this very badly, for he was not a careful liar, and the strain on his powers of dissimulation was great. Had Eva been less in love with him, or more given to suspecting the honesty of her fellows, she must assuredly have found him out. Truly, she had her doubts of him sometimes, but they were only doubts of his ability, and not of his intentions. She parted from her illusions painfully, as a few people part from money; it was her weakness, where her affections were engaged, to beguile herself into believing that which her native shrewdness of perception discredited: this she did at the sacrifice of her peace of mind. Her strivings after self-deception never reached the point of success where total immunity from doubt is ensured, but always fell short of it, so that, having quite deluded herself, she was still torn and tortured with vague, vain fears for the issue of the line of conduct she had determined on. It was impossible that she should not discover, even before marriage brought her into hourly contact with him, some of the defects in John's moral and mental equipment. But, as women will, she condoned these things in him for the sake of his muscles and his beauty; she was, besides, too clever herself to greatly admire intellect in others; and in his one grand peccadillo, which he had confessed to and received pardon for, all the minor meannesses of his nature were swamped. Then, by her revelation of her true self to him, she had compelled his unwilling admiration, and attracted him to her. In the moment when he felt he might lose her he learned to greatly desire her, and to her entire subjection eagerly applied all those graces and charms of person with which Nature had endowed him. And having won her

for himself he was careful to be tender with her that she might concede to him a full measure of her favours. With the death from satiety of his desire his tenderness would die too. Thus it happened that their honeymoon had been a fairly joyous month for both. Eva had a good opinion of John; and it sometimes occurs that a bad man will endeavour to retain another's good opinion of him even at the cost of being virtuous. There were, it is true, moments when the woman's love was whelmed in a storm of scornful wonder, and a great despair settled on her heart; but these were moods and passed and were forgotten. A kiss dispelled them or a careless word or light caress. An aftermath of pain lingered always, but pain is an inevitable ingredient in the happiness of women, and so they have come to regard it. There is no quittance in full for any draft on joy.

Eva had marvelled at the splendid vagueness of John's aspirations. He had used to her the words that he had used to his mother in extenuation of his native idleness and predilection for vice.

"I want to study some art," he had said; "painting, music, literature, the stage, something noble and inspiring. Literature, now, I feel I might do something there; or the stage, I have ability in that direction; or painting—painting attracts me. The trouble is to find my line."

It is possible that he really believed in himself, and was vaguely ambitious of realising his aspirations. Eva accepted this, but with the reservation before mentioned. She had caused to be set apart in the house that was to be their home, one room for his especial use. Previously, she had beguiled him into giving her some general idea of the manner of study he desired, and she had furnished his room in accordance with the idea. When he came to view it, he was vastly pleased with the result of her loving labours; for was not the whole matter a handsome acknowledgment of the validity of his pretensions? He decided at once in favour of literature for a vocation, and ordered a great deal of stationery on the first day of his installation. Further than that, however, he had not got at the expiration of a fortnight after their homecoming.

The day was wet and he was sulking in his room, with a cigar and a newspaper.

"Damn the weather!" he exclaimed at intervals with

the splenetic vehemence of a man to whom the weather cannot possibly be of moment. "Damn the weather!"

There came a tapping at the door.

"Well?" he shouted.

"Are you busy?" inquired the voice of Eva.

"Not particularly."

"May I come in?"

"O, yes, come in."

"You are sure I shall not interrupt you?"

"No, no; come in."

She had wanted him to open the door to her, but he did not.

"What a bonny fire you have in here!" said Eva, entering the room. "And how delicious your cigar smells."

"It's a vile weed."

"I want to have a real good talk about something—someone. But if you fancy it will tire you I will wait till you are—till another time."

"Till I am what?"

"I said, 'Till another time.'"

"You were going to say, 'Till I am in a better temper.'"

"I——" stammered Eva.

"It doesn't matter," he said.

"I came to talk about your old folk," began Eva, after a pause; "about your father and mother."

"You have come for my references, eh? Isn't it a bit late? O, but you came before, didn't you? And I put you off. Or did you say you were content to do without them?"

"I said——but you should remember, sir." She laughed and shook a finger at him.

He stirred, peevishly, in his chair.

"Don't, Eva," he said. "Your lightheartedness is too ghastly on a day like this."

"The rain has got on your nerves."

"Damn my nerves!"

Eva rose hastily, her face flushing.

"You're horribly rude," she said, angrily.

He altered his humour.

"Yes——to the weather," he replied.

"You almost swore at me."

"I swore at my nerves."

"I wish you would be more amiable. I don't like it."

"I do. You look so pretty. That pose suits you. You

should always stand on your dignity. You would, if you knew how becoming it was to you."

Nevertheless, he was gnawing his fingers feverishly. Eva subsided.

"Tell me about your old people," she said. "Do they live in London?"

"Yes."

"Near?"

"No, in the suburbs."

"Have you written to them lately?"

"No, not for a long time. I told you we are not friends."

"But that is so dreadful. Why aren't you friends?"

"There are hosts of reasons. The chief one is, they don't understand me."

"But your own people?"

"I am an ugly duckling."

"Do they know you are married?"

"No."

"Haven't you told them?"

"No."

"And they don't know where you are?"

"No."

"Not even if you are alive or dead?"

"No."

"O, John, dear, do write to them."

He had been twiddling a pencil-case. He put it down on the table and rose.

"I don't want to have anything more to do with them," he said.

Eva's face went very white. "Don't you *love* your father and mother, John?" she whispered.

He laughed harshly. "Look here, my dear," he said, "I have answered your questions because I don't want there to be any mystery about it, but I would rather you dropped the subject for the future."

"But your mother, John! She——you love her?"

He stopped in the act of stooping to set back in its place an overturned corner of the rug at his feet. He raised his head and sat gazing at her, very sternly. But his thoughts were busy with his mother.

"I don't know," he said, slowly. "Yes. Perhaps. Don't talk about it."

She regarded him silently for a space.

"Let *me* write to her, John," she said. "Do you remember my father said, that time you met, he fancied you must be like your mother?"

"Never mind about that. Drop the subject altogether. There isn't anything under heaven I would not rather talk about."

Eva sighed and wandered to the mantel and stood there, looking down into the fire. John lighted a fresh cigar.

"But, John," she said at length, very timidly.

"Don't speak of it any more, please."

She remained silent, but a cloud of trouble settled on her face, and she sighed.

"God! but you are a merry companion for a wet day!" he exclaimed.

She looked at him, half smiling, but made no retort.

"There's another thing," she said.

"Yes?"

"Polly Weed."

"Eh?"

"I think, John—don't be cross!—I really think you are rather unkind to dear, old Polly."

"Unkind to her! What do you mean? You surely don't expect me to make a friend of her."

"I only want you not to treat her entirely as our servant. She is not that. She has been very good to me. She is a friend of mine. I'm afraid you don't quite understand the position. She is very fond of me, and I of her. She feels things very keenly. Please, John, be nice to her. Make her at ease with you."

"She's terribly at ease with *you*, at any rate. Isn't that enough?"

"No, not quite, if you will forgive me for saying so. You might humour me in this, John. I believe you do know what I mean, and I am sure you are really too kind at heart to cause her pain when you might give her intense pleasure. Ask her how she is, sometimes. I should even like her to take her meals with us, but I know she wouldn't care about it. Come, dear John, you will humour me in this. I understand that you can't quite see why you should. But you will?"

John grunted. "O, very well," he said. "Have her up, now, and we'll kiss all round. Or shall we wait on her downstairs, in the kitchen?"

Eva laughed, but constrainedly.

"I've been thinking," said John, "that we ought to give a dinner. A really nice dinner. I'll make out the invitation list, a short one, of course; and you shall write to the people and do what else is necessary."

"It will be jolly," said Eva.

"There's that fellow we met in Trois—what was his name?—Gussie Ackron. And the editor man and his wife."

"Mr. and Mrs. Maunders?"

"Yes."

"But are they nice people, John? Mrs. Maunders, I thought . . . I didn't like her much."

"She's a jolly pretty woman. . . . Perhaps that is why, though."

"John!"

Eva's lip curled.

"*I* know your sex," said John, laughing. "It won't do with me, you know."

The tears started to Eva's eyes. "I think you are positively offensive," she exclaimed. "You ought to know me better. I am not that sort of woman."

"What sort of woman?"

"The sort that objects to prettiness in other women. How dare you say such a thing to me! And it's an insult to yourself as well."

He scowled, and rose slowly and approached her. She quailed before the dark face he bent close to hers.

"You're in a devil of a temper this morning," he said.

"I'm not. It's you."

He took her arm roughly. "Understand me," he said. "I am not that sort of man, either."

"Eh?"

"I mean the sort of man that objects to prettiness in other women. I——"

She uttered a short, gasping cry and wrenched herself free of him.

"How dare you!" she cried, stamping her foot. "You coward!"

He laughed grimly. He was in a great rage.

"Don't—don't look at me like that!" she screamed, suddenly.

He passed his hand slowly over his mouth to hide a grin

of triumph. She remembered that she had once thought it a kingly hand.

"O, I'm so sorry," she faltered. "I didn't mean anything, John. It's the weather, I suppose. We're both upset a little, somehow. It would be terrible for us to quarrel."

"It would," he agreed.

"We didn't quite quarrel, John?"

"No?"

"I don't really object to Mrs. Maunders. Have whom you like, John. Your friends are my friends, of course, just as I want mine to be yours. Dear, don't scowl."

He gulped his spleen and smiled. She waited for him to express something of contrition, too. She felt she was not altogether wrong, that some of the blame attached to him, also. But he uttered no word of kindness.

"It's all over, John, eh?" she ventured.

"It was all over before it began, as far as I was concerned," he replied.

She hesitated a moment, and then went out. She descended to the library and took a book from the shelves and tried to read. At first, she could not for her tears. Her heart was sore within her. The book she had chosen was a volume of poetry. She turned the leaves, listlessly, not heeding what she read; but, presently, lighting on a passage of exceptional beauty, her attention was arrested. She took the book into a dim corner, where one thin shaft of light transfixed the gloom, and sitting down there, was transported in an instant to that fairy realm where only the chosen ones of earth may dwell. She read for an hour.

Her attention had wandered from the text, and she was intending to put the book aside and go out, when she heard her husband's tread on the stairs, coming down. At the same moment she heard the heavy footfall of Mrs. Polly Weed, ascending from the kitchen. The parties met outside the door of the library.

"Now he will speak to her," thought Eva, and put aside her book.

"Er—Mrs. Weed," said John.

"Yes, sir."

"Where is your mistress?"

"Gone out to do some shopping, I think; I ain't heard nothink of her for a long time."

"Are you sure she is out?"

"I know she was going. And the rain is cleared off. But I will find out, if you like, sir."

"It doesn't matter," said John, with the natural carelessness of a lazy man. "I wanted to speak to you, really; but I shouldn't care for her to overhear me."

Eva half rose, but sat down again.

"Me, sir!" exclaimed Polly.

"Yes. Look here, Mrs. Weed, it's best we should come to a proper understanding. It seems that you have some influence with my wife. She has taken it into her head that you were good to her once."

"It's a queer fancy, surely, and an uncommon one."

"It is. That's why I don't want it to have too much encouragement. I think you are too familiar altogether with my wife. You presume on her silly liking for you. I'm not blaming you; you would be a bigger fool than I suspect you of being if you didn't look out for yourself and make the best of things. But, all the same, I'm not going to have it. Your relations with us are purely of a business nature; we pay you to do certain things, and you do them. So long as you are paid you should be satisfied. I want there to be no mistake about this."

"There isn't," said Polly.

"You will, please, in future, take care to remember that your place is the kitchen, and that I don't employ you to play the part of parlour-confidant to my wife. I object strongly to your conduct, and if you persist in it I shall discharge you. That is all. I have no fault to find with you, so far as your ordinary duties are concerned, though you are a little too old for your billet, and draw more wages than you are entitled to. You understand. I have no more to say, except—wait a moment, Mrs. Weed—except that if I find you have said anything to my wife of what has passed between us, I shall express my displeasure at once in the one way that is open to me. You may go."

"Thank you, sir."

He returned to his room and she to the kitchen.

Eva sat in her corner of the library, staring out of a bloodless face, with set teeth, and clenched hands.

CHAPTER XXI

EVA did not tell John that she had overheard his conversation with Polly Weed, nor did she offer any word on the matter to the old woman. It were best, she thought, to keep silence ; but her silence stung her. She did not consciously shift her attitude toward her husband ; but he saw the alteration in her demeanour, notwithstanding, and it moved him to sullen anger. He seemed to be for ever watching her from the corners of his eyes, what time he was not in his room at his potations. His addiction to drink had always troubled Eva, but only vaguely ; she accepted it as a part of the inevitable brutality of mankind. And, then, the memory of her own father's excesses inclined her to be tolerant. To judge this man were to judge her sacred dead.

There was great preparation for the dinner-party. Eva readily gave her time to this business, being, indeed, glad of the relief from carking thought that it afforded her. But only her duty was engaged, and not her heart. It pained her that the day appointed for the feast should be Sunday, but John said it must be so, and she did not gainsay him. He had expected opposition of a sort from her, knowing her religious prejudices, and her meek acquiescence displeased him. She knew this, and sighed over it, but could not humour him ; and herein she was wise. It may seem that she sighed too much. Sighs are a potent irritant to men, and they should be. But, then, sighs are the commas in a woman's life, and straighten the story of it. Delete them, and there remains only a fibreless jumble of inconsequences.

Late in the afternoon of the day appointed for the dinner-party, Lizzie Glint came to Eva in a state of great agitation.

"What is the matter?" Eva asked.

"O, 'm ! Mrs. Weed, 'm !"

"Yes, yes?"

"Gone, 'm."

"Gone! Where?"

"Gone away, 'm. For good, 'm."

"What do you mean? Tell me, quick. Come."

"She went away, 'm, a hour ago. And, oh! she cried that bitter it nearly broke my 'art to see her."

"Where has she gone? How do you know she has gone away for good? And it isn't for good, I'm afraid."

"She told me so, 'm. She come to me and said, 'Lizzie, promise me faithful you'll do what I'm going to ask you.' I was that surprised, you may be sure 'm, but I promised. 'I'm going away, Lizzie,' she said, 'for good.' 'Going away!' I said. 'For good,' I said. I couldn't hardly credit it at first, 'm, you see. 'Yes,' she said. 'For good. And, Lizzie,' she said, 'I want you to wait jest a hour before you tell our dear, dear missis, or she'll be fetching me back, which I don't want.' Then she started crying and a-saying she hoped you'd forgive her, for she would always go on loving you though you was parted, and she prayed you might be happy, and think of her sometimes, and it wasn't your fault she was going, and she didn't want you to trouble after her no more, to bring her back."

"Stop, stop!" cried Eva. "When was this?"

"A hour ago, 'm. You see, I promised to wait the hour."

"Which way did she go?"

"I don't know, 'm. She wouldn't let me go to the door with her."

"Have you any idea as to what she proposed doing? or where I might find her?"

"No, 'm, I ain't got the ghost of a notion."

"O, Polly, Polly!" Eva wailed. "How could you go away like that? O, I wish I had spoken to her. And you can give me no help, Lizzie?"

"No, 'm. *I* don't know where she's gone. She's very strong-minded, 'm, I'm afraid. I shouldn't think you'd get her back."

"Don't croak, you little idiot!" Eva cried.

"No, 'm."

"I beg your pardon. Perhaps you had better go away now. I'll think about it."

"Yes, 'm."

Lizzie Glint departed to the kitchen. Eva sat down in a mood of blank despair. She was full of bitterness; her heart inveighed against her husband, who had done this thing. It was so unpardonably mean and petty an act. She felt she could have forgiven a showier sin. She rose, flushing, and raged up and down the room, up and down, up and down, her body quivering, racked with shame and blind, furious impotence.

"O, my God!" she cried. "O, my God! And I loved the tiny, little thing."

She shuddered, and stopped, and sat her down again.

"It's almost farcical," she said aloud; "and yet, it is tragic, too!"

She lay down on her bed and buried her face in the pillow. Thus she remained for nearly an hour. She heard her husband's voice in the room below in conversation with the French cook who had been engaged to prepare the dinner. The cook was complaining bitterly of Lizzie Glint's high-handed incompetence and the absurd limitations of the kitchen range.

"Yah, it is terrible!" he said. "I am compromised altogether. It vill be ze ruin of my reputation, vot you call it!"

Eva laughed shrilly; her body was racked with mirth; she rolled on the bed, shrieking.

"Vat vas dat?" she heard the Frenchman ask.

"Eh?" cried John. "It sounds like a woman in hysterics." He had thrown open the door and was listening. Eva laughed again. "It's my wife," said John. "Eva, Eva, what is it?" And he came up the stairs. He threw open the door. Eva rolled over on her back and looked up at him, laughing.

"What's the matter?" he exclaimed, bending over her. "Are you ill?"

"Ill? Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!" screamed Eva. "No. Polly's gone, that's all. And I'm laughing at the Frenchman."

John plucked his lips, doubtfully.

"Polly gone?" he said. "When? Where? How? What are you grinning like that for?"

"Isn't it funny?" asked Eva. She sat up with a strong effort at self-control. "Wait a minute, wait a minute," she said, breathlessly.

Her face became serious once more.

"I don't understand," said John. "What has upset you?"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute," she commanded him, in a peevish tone.

He sat down beside her and made a movement to put his arm about her waist. She pushed him away.

"No," she said, imperiously.

His ready anger kindled on the instant.

"What the devil do you mean by that?" he asked.

She did not answer him, but looked into his eyes.

"You understand?" she said. "Polly Weed has gone away."

"Well?"

"Do you know why she has gone away?"

His bold eyes met her gaze. He laughed.

"How *should* I know?" he said.

It sickened her to see him. She got up and walked away from him. She was going out at the door, but he ran after her.

"Wait," he said.

She turned on him with a white, haggard face.

"Don't touch me!" she cried. "I won't have your hand on me!"

He stood still, watching her. At last he spoke. His words came slowly.

"I don't know what has come over you lately," he said. "You've altered very strangely. You avoid me. You don't talk to me. I have sat in my room for three hours straight off, and not once have you looked in to see how I was getting on, or if I wanted anything."

"You wanted solitude the last time I came," she reminded him. "And there is a bell."

"And you half sneer at me, too," he said, quickly. "And —and I won't have it."

"What will you have?" she asked.

"I will have you as you used to be," he said. "Understand that. I will take nothing less."

"Are you as you used to be?"

"I don't care a damn whether I am or not. That has nothing to do with it. *You* must be the same." He put an iron hand of constraint upon his anger, realising from her face that his words were missing their desired effect.

"It won't do," he said. "I'm not the man to vent ill-humours upon. The little airs and whims that are pretty in a maiden are damned bad taste in a wife."

"Don't swear so much," she said.

The fury blazed out in his face. She saw the gleam of his white teeth. But he still restrained himself in a measure.

"We'll talk of this another time," he said, quietly. "The people will be here soon. I must go and dress. You dress, too. Put on your prettiest gown and your prettiest manner. My friends are men of good taste, and I have a reputation for good taste, too. I don't want to lose it."

He gave her a dark glance and went away.

CHAPTER XXII

EVA presided at the dinner-table with quiet grace and simple dignity. Her face was pale and her manner subdued; there was an occasional quaver in her voice; but she had never appeared so winning or beautiful. She wore a gown of white silk with flounces at the bottom of it, edged with pink ruche, and an over-skirt of white tulle spotted with gold. Her bodice, loose fitting, was confined at the waist within a gilt belt. There were small white and pink chrysanthemums in her hair, among foliage, and a string of pearls upon her neck. The dress was her own creation, and she had been prettily vain of it. Even now it affected her to some complacency of mood.

The guests were Mr. and Mrs. Maunders, he tall, erect, slightly inclined to be stout, with a hard florid face and hard florid manner, she small, plump, gliding, moist of eye and lip, with faintly flushed cheeks and sleek black hair; Mr. Gussie Ackron, a feeble youth of blond complexion; the Misses Ackron, his sisters, two ladies of ample charms, with tinkling voices; and Mr. Maccabæus Kiloh, hazily dubbed "Mac," who was thought to be rich because he was Jewish. Two disguised undertakers from somewhere in Piccadilly waited on the guests at table.

The party being small, the conversation was general.

"That's what I laike, don't you know," said Gussie Ackron over his soup. "It's so snug. Give you my word, Mrs. Coldershaw, when I dine with my uncle, Sir Henry Hotts, I often don't know who I'm sitting down with. I'm so horribly short-sighted, don't you know, Mrs. Coldershaw, and some of 'em are such a devil of a way off. I hear 'em laughing laike—laike anything over something, sometimes, somewhere, and—give you my word, Mrs. Coldershaw, they might be laughing at me for all I know."

"Everything is very local, eh?" said Mr. Maunders.

"That's it," said Gussie Ackron, eagerly. "Give you

my word, you couldn't have been apter in your remark."

"Mr. Maunders is so apt," said the elder Miss Ackron. "What is it? No, thank you."

"What have you got up your sleeve for the Daisy Stakes, Mac?" asked Mr. Maunders.

"O, *do* put us on something good," said Mrs. Maunders. "Dear Mr. Kiloh is so clever, Mrs. Coldershaw."

"There's nothing about yet," said Mr. Kiloh.

"Jack o' Lantern is *my* fancy," said John Coldershaw.

"Jack o' Lantern is quite in the clouds though, as yet, isn't he?" said Gussie Ackron. "The sort of fancy that's never laikely to become a fact."

"My brother is so witty," said the younger Miss Ackron.

"They often are at that age," said Mrs. Maunders.

"You speak as if wit was a sort of measles, don't you know," said Gussie Ackron.

"O, but it isn't," said Mrs. Maunders, gravely.

"I am afraid that I know nothing of horse-racing," remarked Eva, in smiling reply to a question from Mr. Kiloh.

"Then you bet? The two things always go together."

"No," said Eva.

"O, my dear Mrs. Coldershaw, you should," said the younger Miss Ackron, who danced in the ballet.

"It's *so* interesting to know all about starting prices and odds and evens and spavins and things," supplemented the elder Miss Ackron, who also danced in the ballet. "And when you get a good thing to back it's so nice. And, you know—this between us, my dear—it's always safe to have something on with a gentleman, because you can't lose to him and he pays up, anyway."

"I'm afraid I'm not to be persuaded," Eva said.

"That's lucky for you, Coldershaw," interpolated Mr. Maunders. "A wife who bets is the devil—you'll excuse me, my dear," to Mrs. Maunders.

"Flattered," said the lady, laconically.

"You see, women don't understand the rules of the game, and they are so unsportsmanlike. They always want to go shares with us. And it isn't as rosy as it sounds. We share their losses and they share our gains."

"I'm sure," said Mrs. Maunders, "that isn't true of me."

She spoke with some warmth.

"How ungallant you are, to be sure," said the elder Miss Ackron.

"No, no," he pleaded. "That isn't fair. You misunderstand me altogether. A universal truth should never be put to the test of individual application. Large generalities are like Scotch mists: you can see 'em and accept their existence, but you can't enclose a cubic foot of 'em."

"Very good, very good!" cried Gussie Ackron. "Give you my word, Maunders, I haven't heard a cleverer thing for weeks. I don't know that it isn't better than Major Worrall's latest. You've heard that?"

"No," said every one.

"O, it was apropos, don't you know, of the Glanrally gal—the one that married Lord Homibeg. We were talking about her at the club."

"Poor thing!" murmured the elder Miss Ackron.

"And the Major said—you know his way, Maunders?"

"The Major! I should think so."

"He said, shooting his cuffs—he always shoots his cuffs when he's going to say anything really smart, Mrs. Coldershaw. That's how we know."

"Yes," said Eva.

"He said, 'She may be a devilish fine woman, but she's a very insignificant lady!'"

"How rude of him!" tinkled the younger Miss Ackron. "Really, Gus, I'm ashamed of you!"

"O, but she is, you know," said Mrs. Maunders.

"Of course she is. But, still, there's the principle involved."

"The men certainly have no right to dissect us in that way," said the elder Miss Ackron. "Think what would happen to their characters if we treated them like that."

"It would be total extinction, give you my word," said Gussie Ackron, chuckling.

"There was a dust-up at the *Badgers* last night, I hear," said John. "Were you in it, Mac?"

"No; but Maunders was. I happened to be—er—elsewhere."

"She must be a real charmer, I should think," said Gussie Ackron.

"She is," said Mr. Kiloh, seriously. "Her name's

Miss Venezuelan Sixes. I had to go to Brighton to look after her."

"The dust-up?" queried the elder Miss Ackron.

"Yes, please," said Eva, timidly. "I don't know what it is."

"Bravo, Mrs. Coldershaw!" cried Gussie Ackron. "Coldershaw, I hope you may never explain by illustration."

"Give you my word, I never will," John drawled. "But Mr. Maunders is going to tell us about it. Somebody was knocked down, I understand, Maunders."

"Yes. It was young Bates. A regular nose-ender, too."

"Bates, eh!" cried Mac. "That boy takes a lot of killing, doesn't he? He was drinking liqueur brandy as a beverage eight months ago."

"Poor devil!" Ackron sneered.

"It seems he has been plunging lately," Mr. Maunders said, "and to an awful extent. He goes about now, you know, asking for good things. On Thursday he got something out of Jibbles for the Copper Plate, and it didn't come off. So, last night, there he was at the *Badgers* raging up and down the floor like a lion cracker in a crowd. 'Jibbles is a fool!' he said. Just then Jibbles came in and someone told him about it. He went up to young Bates and knocked him down. It was a beauty! 'When a man calls me a fool I never give him time to prove it,' he said. And there'll be something interesting in the Gazette, I fancy."

Eva gave an eyebrow to the ladies, and they departed for the drawing-room. There they sulked and yawned in remote corners, saying little, and that as tersely as possible. They were not at ease with their hostess and uttered only the thinnest commonplaces. Eva did her best to promote conversation, but it was vain. Soon she was reduced to awkward silence. A mood of unwonted heaviness settled on her. She felt incapable of effort, and was fain to listen absently to the noisy laughter proceeding from the dining-room.

"I wish they would leave the door open," remarked the elder Miss Ackron.

"Men are so selfish," said her sister.

"Or considerate," added Mrs. Maunders.

"I hate to be considered in that way," snapped the elder Miss Ackron. "Men are fools to think our sex has the monopoly of virtue."

"They must be," said Mrs. Maunders. "Eh, Mrs. Coldershaw?"

"I suppose so," Eva murmured, wearily.

There came a tap at the door, and Lizzie Glint entered the room. She crossed over to Eva, with a sidelong glance at the other fine ladies on her way.

"Yes?" said Eva.

"Someone to see you, 'm."

"O, but I am engaged. Who is it?"

"A man from the West London Orspitai, he says, 'm. And it's very important."

"I hope it is important," said Eva, "because——"

"O, *please*, my dear Mrs. Coldershaw!"

"Thank you," said Eva.

She went out.

"*Gauche!*" murmured Mrs. Maunders.

The Misses Ackron purred softly and laughed.

Eva found her visitor in the hall. He wore a livery. At her approach he pulled a forelock.

"What is it?" she asked him.

"A bad case, Miss," he said. "Name o' Weed."

Eva's hand rose to her blanched lips.

"It was brought in a hour ago. Old lady, very respectable, but under the influence of drink. Run over in Pool Street by an omnibus. No hope."

"No hope!" uttered Eva.

"We found this on her, Miss, so come to you."

He handed Eva a letter which she had written to Polly during her sojourn abroad. It contained a few housewifely instructions and many loving messages.

"I will come at once," said Eva, giving the man money. "Tell her I will come at once. And thank you."

"I'm afraid it ain't no good a-telling of her anything," said the man. "She's right off her head."

"She will know me, I'm sure she will," said Eva. "I was her best friend."

The man shook his head and departed.

"Go and tell Mr. Coldershaw, I must see him at once," said Eva, addressing Lizzie Glint, who had stood by listening with wide eyes. Then Eva remembered suddenly what

had been hinted at by the ladies in the drawing-room; and flew to intercept the girl. "No," she said; "I will go myself."

Even as she spoke the door of the dining-room opened, and the men trooped out into the hall, laughing, with flushed faces and jaunty gait.

"John!" said Eva.

He turned.

"Eh," he cried. "What's up?"

"I must speak to you a moment, quietly."

"O, but, my dear——"

"I must," she said, softly. "Make those others go away."

He whispered to the men and they passed into the drawing-room. She heard the glad cry of the ladies, heralding their advent. She turned to John.

"Polly has been run over," she said.

"Old Mrs. Weed?"

"Yes." She told him the story. "Make my excuses to your guests," she said. "I am going up to change my dress."

"You can't go out to-night. It's impossible."

"I must."

"You must not! I won't have it. They would feel that they had been insulted. Come, Eva, don't be absurd. I was quite proud of you at table. Don't go and spoil it all, now."

"I'm sorry," she faltered; "but I must go to Polly."

He saw that she was resolved and yielded with unexpected graciousness. Eva was running away, but he called her back.

"Give me a kiss!" he said. "You're looking simply charming to-night. And I deserve it for giving in."

"But—the girl," she whispered.

He looked at Lizzie Glint, who still stood by, apparently transfixed.

"A little envy won't hurt her," he said.

Eva lifted her face. He laughed and crushed her in his arms, and put his hot lips to her mouth and to her eyes.

"You're sweeter than sin to-night," he said, releasing her.

She ran upstairs, with flaming cheeks.

In five minutes she came down again, divested of her brave attire. One of the disguised undertakers called a cab and she rode away.

The night was bleak. The air was clear and crisp. The streets shone white in the glare of the gas. People were hurrying home from church. There was a merry hum of voices, replacing the usual blare and rattle of trade and traffic.

The West London Hospital was a big, grim edifice of forbidding exterior. A small, suave gentleman of subdued demeanour, with plump, white hands that fluttered when he talked, led Eva to the ward where Polly lay. He gave her into the care of a nurse.

"No. 19," he said.

Eva asked the nurse, "Is she dying?"

"There is no hope," was the reply. "It is best you should know. She may last a few hours. She cannot live till to-morrow. Just now she is delirious."

Eva bent over the bed.

"Polly," she whispered.

The old woman rolled her head and started to babble unmeaningly. Her face had escaped injury; but it was drawn and distorted with pain. Her lips were quite black; her closed eyelids showed purple.

"Polly!" Eva whispered again.

"You can only wait," said the nurse.

She placed a chair beside the bed and Eva sat down.

The ward was a long, plain apartment, containing, perhaps, twenty beds. At the further end of the room three nurses sat dozing over a great fire. Their shadows, magnified and distorted, were flung on the ceiling, where they danced eerily in gay defiance of the dim light of the lowered gas. The atmosphere was warm and still; there was no sound, save when a patient groaned or cried out or raved deliriously. Sometimes a nurse coughed or stepped lightly across the bare boards, and the slight noise found a thousand dull echoes in the rafters. At long intervals some shrill cry from the streets or hoot of distant river-steamer floated up, ghostlike.

The tears oozed from Eva's eyes and rolled slowly down her cheeks. Her heart seemed to have grown cold and her brain throbbed. At the nurse's solicitation she removed her bonnet and shawl.

An hour passed and still Polly did not regain consciousness. She seemed to be sleeping.

Eva turned to the nurse.

"Is it true," she asked, "that she was under the influence of drink?"

"I'm afraid so," was the reply.

Eva thanked her and relapsed into silence. Her tears were dried up now. She sat very still, her hands clasped tightly in her lap, with puckered brow and brooding eyes. Suddenly she uttered a low, hoarse cry.

"What is it?" whispered the nurse. "You mustn't."

"I—was—thinking," said Eva.

The nurse regarded her curiously.

"She was not a relation?"

"No; my very dear friend."

"You tried to reclaim her, perhaps?"

"I *did* reclaim her."

The nurse smiled slightly and shrugged her shoulders.

"I *did* reclaim her," repeated Eva. "There was a cause of this."

She touched the bed.

The nurse affected to be bored; she did not understand.

Two more hours passed and still Polly's condition remained the same. A doctor came in. He passed slowly from bed to bed, examining the patients and whispering instructions to an attendant nurse, until, proceeding by slow stages, he arrived at the bedside of Polly.

"Not gone yet; I am surprised," he murmured. He bent down. "She may last till the morning, after all," he said.

His presence had disturbed the stricken woman. She rolled over, muttering unintelligibly, and opened her eyes.

"Well, my good woman," he said.

"Well," she answered.

Her voice was broken and changed. The gates of speech flapped loosely. But the manner was native to Polly Weed. Eva started up.

"Polly," she said.

The old woman turned her eyes on the tearful, smiling face. There was no light of recognition in them.

"Don't you know me, Polly?"

"Eh?"

A shade of perplexity wrinkled the yellow old face.

"Eva, Eva."

"No, no," muttered Polly, wearily. "I—I forget."

"Eva, your plaguey Eva. Your friend who was ill—your friend, Polly!"

"Friend!" said the old woman. "Friend! Ha! ha! No, no."

She turned her head away and closed her eyes.

The doctor moved on to the next bed, which was the last of the row, and presently departed. The attendant nurse rejoined her companions at the fireside.

The heavy minutes passed and measured hours. A new batch of nurses replaced the old. It drew near to the dawn.

Still Eva sat watching and waiting and praying.

At the break of day Polly stirred again and opened her eyes.

"Was it friend ye said?" she cried.

The horror of her voice caused Eva to shrink and shudder.

"Polly, Polly!" she whispered. "Polly, it is Eva. Come home to me again, dear old Polly."

She spoke wildly, torn and worn with the long agony of waiting and her great grief.

"Friend!" Polly muttered again. "I have no friend but Death."

"You have me!" Eva wailed.

"I want to go home," said Polly.

A spasm shook her. She half rose.

"Eva, my little one!" she gasped.

Then she fell back.

And her Friend took her by the hand to lead her Home.

A cab was called for Eva, and she returned through the grey streets to her own dwelling, feeling woefully forlorn and numbed and shaken by her long vigil and the distress of heart she had endured. Looking out at the window of the cab she was surprised to see, a few houses away from her destination, three men walking on the pavement whom she recognised as her husband's quests, Mr. Ackron, Mr. Kiloh, and Mr. Maunders. She drew back at sight of them and so they did not see her. As she alighted from the cab they turned the corner and were lost to view.

Lizzie Glint was sweeping the hall; the door of the house stood open. Eva entered.

"How is Mrs. Weed?" asked Lizzie.

"Dead," said Eva.

She spoke listlessly, carelessly. Lizzie Glint dropped her broom with a crash and collapsed in a chair. Eva hesitated, then went on; she was in no mood for talking at that juncture. As she passed her husband's room she saw that the door of it stood open. A stream of gas-light, pouring forth, fell on the stairs. She stopped and peeped in.

Her husband sat at a table strewn with cards, his chin in his hands, a dead cigar between his lips. He looked up. His face was pallid and greasy, his eyes bloodshot, his hair tossed in disorder; haggard lines showed about his eyes and mouth. Eva stood watching him till a sickness surged up in her throat and she was fain to sink into a chair, overcome with nausea. The room reeked of foul odours and the air was hot and heavy. A silver thread of light, filtering in under the drawn blind, shamed the false glitter of the gas with its hint of a purer atmosphere.

John looked at Eva and caught up the glass at his elbow.

"Well?" he said, raising it to his lips.

She rose and went to the door.

"Commere," he said, thickly. "Don't run away as if I were the plague."

"What do you want?" she asked. "I am tired, and anxious to get a little rest."

He grinned vacantly, then his mood altered and he scowled.

"Here's a pretty thing!" he cried, staggering to his feet. "A very pretty thing! And what's to be done with the owner of this very pretty thing? Why, box her up and send her to the devil for a naughty wife! She goes away and I ask 'em to take *their* naughty wives home and come back for a bit of play. And here's a pretty thing—a very pretty thing! I get cleared out and worse than that. It's the cards, my dear, the cards! I can play the game with any man, give me equal luck with him. But when it's deuce, deuce, deuce, all the time and not a single pip to anchor by——"

"Tell me to-morrow," said Eva. "I have just come from the hospital. I am tired."

"Hospital for broken hearts?"

She was filled with scorn of him.

"It may sober you to know," she began hotly; but he interrupted her with a burst of maudlin laughter.

"The old woman, ha, ha!" he cried. "The old woman, yes. She had her fine feelings, eh? She was a tender old blossom, she was. Well?"

"She is dead!" Eva said. "And God forgive you for it."

"She is dead, eh?" muttered John. "Dead!" He stood, swaying, with his mouth extended in a mirthless grin. "Dead! And a damned good riddance, too!"

CHAPTER XXIII

THE skies wept at the funeral of poor Polly Weed and the winds cried. Nature and Eva were her mourners. Her only blood relatives, those two graceless daughters who had been wont in the old days to empty pailfuls of dirty water over their mother, were not present; for sweet charity's sake we will assume that they had no knowledge of their bereavement. Lizzie Glint accompanied Eva and snuffled sympathetically, but it was impossible to think that she felt real sorrow; she was too much interested in the externals of the ceremony, and too careful of her dress. Doubtless, the inclemency of the weather and the dismal influence of the scene were responsible for her tears.

Polly was buried on the unfashionable side of a large, new cemetery, away from the carved monuments and dark mausoleums, in a part where flowers grew instead of stones and each grave acknowledged humbly the common poverty of dead bones.

Grief was frozen up in Eva so that she could not weep. Her heart ached at the loss of her friend; she felt numbed and lonely and self-pitiful. She envied Lizzie Glint her easy exuberance of woe. The priest's perfunctory ministrations had no power to soften her, though other mourners sobbed at her elbow into new cambric and cried out with thin moans when the wet mud fell on the pretty coffins of their dear departed. Walking homeward through the cemetery it saddened her eyes to see how the bitter weeds of quick forgetfulness had strangled the flowers of memory on many graves; the patter of the rain on the black twigs and unkempt shrubs sounded to her as the thin rattle of sardonic laughter. She was imbued with a mood of cynicism.

"Graveyards are the devil's jest-books," she thought. "How our common foe must shake his sides over these lowly mounds and lofty pedestals!"

And she almost laughed.

She fell asleep on the return journey from sheer weariness and entered her house, feeling miserably tired and cold. There was a new servant in the place of dead Polly Weed: a tall, dark girl with full red lips and fine eyes, named Alice Shallers. She was an excellent cook and had served in the house of a lady of quality, from whom she brought the best references. Eva had an unreasoning dislike of the girl, and had engaged her for that cause, being ever eager to run counter to an uncharitable prepossession.

"Is your master in?" asked Eva.

Alice Shallers answered, "No."

"Then I will have dinner served in my own room," said Eva. "It is snugger there."

It was, indeed, snug enough, but very lonely and dull, notwithstanding. Eva brought no appetite to the repast, though she stood in dire need of it, and sent it down again, almost untasted. She stayed up in her room, reading over the fire, until midnight. Her husband did not return, and she had no knowledge of his wherabouts. But his absence caused her no anxiety. She had lately ceased to care for him altogether, and acknowledged it to herself. The love that she had borne him was dead. It had battened on illusion; with illusion fled, it expired painlessly of inanition. But there was a scar left, and Eva's heart was poorer for the ungrateful draft upon its store of love.

She crept into bed, shivering, not because her body was cold, and lay between the sheets, reviewing the sad events of the day. A few weak tears wetted her pillow; she felt as a child feels that is not understood. She could have suffered agony with fine fortitude, but this misery of stagnation overpowered her. "Life is so big and difficult," she had said to Polly Weed, at a time when life held many hopes for her. It was trebly big and difficult now, she reflected. All those hopes had vanished slowly, one by one, dropping behind her into the irrevocable past with the passage of every hour, till the last was gone. A new hope had been born since that time, which alone stayed with her. She prayed that herein she might not be disappointed. She prayed almost fearfully, as if anxious for the endurance of her fealty to God.

She had fallen asleep when a noise in the house aroused her. She sat up in bed and listened. It was her husband

come home. The door of her room stood ajar, and she could hear his footsteps on the floor of the hall. He was stumbling blindly. He fell heavily once, and the shock of his fall caused the house to tremble. For a space there was silence. Then his tread sounded again. He came up the stairs, singing softly. The balustrade creaked loudly in protest. Eva lay back in bed and feigned sleep. He came into her room, and leaned over her, muttering thickly and laughing. He put a hand on her and she shuddered.

"Wife o' my bosom!" he sniggered. "Pree' wife, I mus' say!"

She no longer feigned sleep, but turned her back to him, fearing to look upon his shame. He stood for a moment, his body bent; then went out from her presence, through a door of communication with his own room. Eva was glad to hear him go. Soon, silence possessed the house again.

And this sad day, with its sad night, was a precursor of many such. Husband and wife saw little of each other, and desired to see less; daily, the breach between them widened. They met, sometimes, at meals, but usually they ate apart, preferring to suit their own taste that way. John was often abroad at the houses of friends, and, occasionally, it was his whim that his wife should accompany him. He was still proud, with the empty conceit of a vain, weak man, of his wife's beauty and wit, and desired that his friends should honour her with their envious admiration. Eva did not gainsay him here, and was careful to be at her best, that he might not be mortified. Often, her complaisance in this particular, fired his blood anew and he reproached her for her attitude of coldness to him, and importuned her for a repetition of old, stale favours. Her indifference changed to active dislike at such times, and, strive as she would, she could not entirely dissemble her sentiments, with the result that he was reduced to hot resentment, and vented his spleen in scowls and clumsy sneers and angry speeches. She answered him, usually, with such spirit and address that he retired discomfited from these contests, and soon avoided them from fear. But they were Pyrrhic victories for her that she regretted more than he.

She had an inconvenient sense of duty that impelled her to meet him half-way in all matters where her self-respect was not involved. If he invited guests, as he was fond of

doing, she omitted no pains to put them at ease and give them good entertainment, though their conversation and manners afforded her no pleasure, but rather offence. His circle of acquaintance was large numerically; but all his friends were Mr. Maunders, Mrs. Maunders, Gussie Ackron, the Misses Ackron, and Maccabæus Kiloh, over and over again; there was no diversity of character among them. She guessed that her husband bragged to them of her devotion to him, and was at pains to countenance his representations, so that the neighbourhood imbibed a great idea of their domestic felicity. Thus she avoided the only result of their estrangement that might have vexed John, and saved alive his good opinion of himself. It was the one sacrifice which she made of her self-respect, and she deemed it small enough not to matter.

John's relations with his dear Maunderses and Ackrons and Kilohs were of a business as well as a social nature. To his growing passion for gaming with cards and tempting Fortune on the race-course he now added a desire to speculate on 'Change. He had quite given up his pretensions to be an artist, and was bent on making money by coarser, easier methods. To this end, he cultivated the acquaintance of such men as had a reputation for shrewdness and perspicacity in business matters. He eagerly solicited their advice and followed it blindly; but with poor success. By nature avaricious, he yet lacked the soberer vices that go to the making of money. He had no power of application or restraint, no patience; and the subtle arts of finesse were beyond him altogether. Soon, his drafts on his wife's modest fortune became considerable. Eva knew of this from Mr. Henson Cleogh, her solicitor, who sent her a letter of kindly remonstrance, in which he adjured her to husband her means better. She was somewhat alarmed and distressed at the intelligence, and resolved to come to an explanation with John when opportunity offered. In the meantime, he must go his way unchecked.

Eva had, very early in her hard life, learned the virtue of resignation, and she did not confound that virtue with the easy acquiescence in both good and evil which too often passes for it. She did not permit her moral perceptions to be thus blunted; she was wiser, and cheerfully accepted what was good in her world whilst deploring the evil. The better to reconcile herself to her unfortunate lot she devoted

herself to study, and in particular embraced the study of ancient history. In the days before her marriage she had had little time to cultivate her mind, but, even so, her natural bent had shown itself in desultory excursions into the wide realms of poetry and philosophy; science had attracted her also, but she realised that her opportunities to make adequate research in this direction were too few and fitful to bring her much solid benefit; the world to explore was too large. Now, she resolved to recompense herself fully. She set down a regular course of study and adhered to it faithfully. She began with such great ardour and derived so much quiet happiness from her studies that she would doubtless have completed the course in a very few years, had not a new distraction entered her life.

She gave birth to a son. It was in the early summer; and from that time forward, though she never lost her taste for wholesome reading, she had only a lukewarm interest in the histories of dead races.

CHAPTER XXIV

God gives children to women that they may not be underpaid for their work in His world.

An attempt to describe in words the emotions of a young mother would be but a piece of vanity in any man. I will not essay the task. Eva loved her child; that must suffice.

There was a friend of John's named Edward King, who desired to stand sponsor to the child at his christening. It was a mere idle whim on the part of Mr. King; but he was a rich man and John was anxious to please him.

"We may as well make the brat of use," he said to Eva.

Eva was flattered by Mr. King's interest in her babe, and felt kindly toward him. She very readily consented and sought out Mr. King to thank him.

"You see," said Mr. King, "I want the child to be named after me. It has always been a fancy of mine to have a king for my godson. You will name your child King Coldershaw?"

Eva had not thought of that; but such is the pretty-sweet vanity of mothers, the idea met her instant approval.

"But he must be called *Edward King Coldershaw*," Eva said; so much her sense of humour demanded of her.

Mr. King demurred to this, but finally yielded. He was a generous man. He settled a sum of five hundred pounds on his godson, and would brook no denial. The amount was to be made payable to the child on his attaining the age of twenty-one years, or sooner if a suitable opportunity offered for its profitable investment.

"If, for instance, the means are not forthcoming for his education," said Mr. King, "or a sum is required to start him in life."

The worthy man died soon afterwards, and the money was found to be duly set aside out of his estate. John always spoke of his child's benefactor as "that convenient idiot, Edward King."

The child, so queerly named, thrived apace. The shadow that had rested on Eva, passed away. She was happier than she had ever been. In the new joy that had come to her she found ample consolation for her manifold sorrows. For every lost illusion she had a thousand new ones now, and all brighter than the old. Her life was dignified and exalted. It had been a reproach to her that she could choose her husband so unwisely; but here was complete justification! She regarded John with kinder eyes because he was the father of her child. They drew closer together and there was even some tender intercourse between them.

Thus six months passed.

One day Eva had occasion to reprimand her servant, Alice Shallers. She spoke mildly, according to her nature, for she was the kindest of mistresses; but the woman answered her with sudden, scornful insolence. Eva's ire was kindled.

"I will not brook such conduct," she said. "You must go. Come to me in half an hour and I will give you a month's salary. That must serve in lieu of notice."

"I'm to go, am I? said Alice Shallers.

"I have said so," said Eva. "Please go away. You will gain nothing by this."

The woman laughed.

"We will see if I am to go," sneered she. "You take a lot on yourself. I shall speak to Mr. Coldershaw about it."

Eva started up. A sickening dread gripped her heart. But she restrained herself and did not speak. Alice Shallers laughed again, very scornfully, and went out. It was impossible to misconstrue the expression of mocking menace in her eyes.

"Now, if this should be as I suspect," thought Eva, "I have done with the pitiful villain for ever."

The voice of her child, crying out, came to her from the room above. She went upstairs and caught her little one to her breast, and wept over it bitterly.

"Surely God speaks to women with the inarticulate voices of babes!" she cried. "O, my child, my child! That he should so dishonour us."

She rocked the child in her arms.

"My little King," she moaned. "O, be a very king to govern me, or I shall kill this man."

She wanted to scream out in an access of rage against him.

This was the end. She could never bear to endure his presence more. She would look upon his face once again, that he might miss no morsel of his overdue humiliation. She would load him with the scorn of her eyes, and then be quit of him for ever.

"I have been soft to him of late," she thought. "Poor, pitiful fool that I am. But I will be hard now."

And her lips tightened.

She could hear him in the room below, laughing with his companions gathered there.

"He has laughed too long," she said.

The baby stirred on her breast and put one tiny hand upon her lips.

"It is the finger of God!" she thought. "Let me not sin, too. Let all the shame be his. I will hold myself blameless in this matter, lest the curse descend upon this little one for a bleak inheritance. My child! His child! My glory! His shame!"

She drew the blinds that the light of heaven might be shut out. It was scorching her.

"I will pray," she said.

She stretched the baby in his cot, and hung over him whilst he slept. Then she went to her bedside and knelt down to pray. She closed her eyes and covered her face with her hands. But her soul was in revolt. She rose, laughing.

"God's in His heaven; all's right with the world," she said. "What a dainty God! Earth might besmirch His godliness, if He left His heaven to set foot on it. Keep in your heaven, O God! All's right with the world!"

The faint sound of her husband's laughter came to her again.

"Yes, laugh!" she cried, in a loud voice. "We can laugh together, now!"

Their mirth rang out more lustily.

"Shame must be a merry burden," said she. "The child can only cry!"

She went to him. He was smiling in his sleep. She touched his dimpled cheek with her finger and he awoke, and looking up, laughed at her.

"Do you understand the game, too, little King?" Eva

murmured. "Are you also penetrated with the humour of it? Perhaps that God who is in His heaven gave you some of His wisdom with your human nature when He sent you into this right world."

Again the sound of laughter was let loose through the house.

"Faugh!" said Eva. "And yet there is nothing unclean. God said it, through the mouth of the least of His disciples, a man worthy of honour because of his great humility. What a beautiful thing is that same humility! What saith the fiery Saint? 'I know and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus that there is nothing unclean of itself.' (You see, little King, nothing unclean!) 'But to him that esteemeth anything to be unclean, to him it is unclean.' Emblazon *that* on the banner of the world!"

She listened. There was no further sound of laughter. She took one book from a row of books that stood on a shelf over her bedhead. Her accustomed fingers fluttered the leaves feverishly. At last she lighted on the text that she sought.

"It is an ordinance of God," she said, solemnly; and began to read out aloud one passage. "'Wherefore, come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing, and I will receive you.'"

She shut the book.

"It is sufficient," she said.

She rose and let in the light again.

She saw no more of her husband that night; he went out from the house with his guests and did not return till the half-dawn. It was toward the evening of the next day when he arose from his debauched sleep. He came downstairs, yawning horribly. Eva heard his approach and braced herself for what must come at their meeting. He entered the room where she was, clad in a loose dressing-gown; his face bore heavy traces of his previous night's dissipation.

He gave his wife a nod of careless greeting and sat down in the window to read a newspaper.

"How's the brat?" he asked.

She could not speak, but sat regarding him, steadily. He looked very mean and tawdry in the morning light.

"Eh?" he asked, looking up. "How's the brat?"

"His *brat* is my *life*," she reflected, within herself; but still she could not speak. He was surprised at her silence.

"Anything the matter?" he said.

Eva's lips parted and something rattled in her throat.

"Aren't you well?" asked John.

"I am quite healthy, thank you," she replied hoarsely. And she wondered why she had used the word "healthy," and what was the derivation of its affix.

"There's something wrong," said John. "I wish you would be more communicative. Is it his majesty?"

"No," said Eva. "King is well, thank God!"

And she repeated the words under her breath; "No, King is well, thank God!"

John looked at her with curious eyes, laughed, shrugged his shoulders, and began to read.

"I wonder," she said, "that you dare enter my presence."

He put the paper aside and lifted his astonished gaze to her face. She rose, her bosom swelling, wrath kindling in her eyes. He rose, too. The newspaper rustled to the floor and slowly settled down. They both averted their gaze to watch it.

"I don't understand you," he said, slowly.

She saw that he was searching in his mind for some forgotten cause of offence against her.

"Their name is legion," she said. "I should not bother."

Her manner confounded him. A shadow of fear crossed his face.

"Eh?" he stammered.

"I wonder," repeated Eva, "that you dare enter my presence."

"You said that before," remarked John. He affected to yawn. "What is it? Amateur theatricals? A joke? Jealousy? What?"

"You shall know," she said.

"Thank you."

There was a pause.

"Yesterday," began Eva, "Alice Shallers——"

She stopped. John uttered a grunt of discomfiture, and a flush of annoyance mantled his face.

"What a damned fool the girl must be!" he cried. "So that's it."

Eva cried out as if stung.

"Is there no shame in men?" she exclaimed.

He came forward, with extended hand.

"Really, Eva," he said, "I'm terribly sorry. The girl ought to have known better than to tell you. She must be a perfect idiot."

"I was that thing—a perfect idiot—once!"

He assumed an aggrieved air.

"I hope you aren't going to be silly enough to make a fuss," he said. "I've admitted I'm sorry. I ask you now to look over it and forgive me. I oughtn't to have acted as I did, I know. But, then, men do these things!"

"Men do these things!" she echoed.

"Come, be a little brick, be sensible. Let the matter drop. It's all over and there's no real harm done. You see that? Then, give me a kiss.

She uttered a cry of horror and disgust and put up her hands to ward him off.

He stopped short in his advance toward her.

"I see," he said, "you are determined to make a scene. Be careful that I don't oblige you with a stormier one than you want."

He plucked at his lips with his fingers.

"Eva!" he said, more mildly.

She had withdrawn to a remote corner of the room and was crouching down against the wall with her face averted from him.

"Do you hear?" he cried.

"Go on; go on," she muttered, in a strangled voice. "Deliver your defence. I will listen."

He stood undecided between reluctant awe of her and a desire to justify himself.

"I have always had a very great respect for you," he said.

Eva laughed.

"I have always felt that you were my—my moral superior. I am not a moral man. Lots of other men are just the same. You can't help your nature. Some are born one way, some another. I was born the other." He sniggered and repeated the jest. "I was born the other."

Eva looked up. He was regarding his reflection in a mirror with much complacency.

"Women are generally more moral than men," continued John. "They have to be. And you are more moral than most women. I have always felt that. Well, you take this little affair very seriously. I can't really blame you, because it is your nature to take things very seriously, and, as I said just now, some of us——"

"You can spare me that oratorical flourish. I remember very well what you said."

She could not forego the sneer. He was put out, confused, discomfited.

"It really amounts to this," he said. "I give a silly servant girl a chuck under the chin and, may be, a few kisses; she——"

"I am not interested in the details of your amours," said Eva. "I don't care to know your methods, though, no doubt, they are as perfectly successful as they are ingenious."

"Who's oratorically flourishing now?" he asked, striving to answer her sneers in kind. "You are a pretty one to talk about oratorical flourishes. You come prepared for this. I don't. I am impromptu."

Eva laughed loudly.

"Damn it!" he said. "You sha'n't laugh at me!"

And he came toward her with his hands clenched.

She rose up quickly and confronted him. Her scorn blasted him. He could not stand against it. He retreated from her.

"If you weren't a woman," he said, brutally, "I would knock you down."

"You mean if I were a woman and afraid of you. Faugh! You are as flabby as the weakest woman. You dare not touch me. You have not even the courage required for that mean act, and hardly the strength."

"Damn you!" he said. "I hate you. I always disliked you. I only married you for your money."

"I am glad," she said, speaking steadily, though her heart bled at the coarse insult. "I am glad that I did not seem a fit mate for you."

"You were glad enough to have me," he reminded her.

She blushed.

"I am not going to quarrel with you," she said.

"You can't get out of it, though. You *were* glad to have me."

"What are you taunting me with? It was no crime. And if it was a folly the taunt should hurt you more than me. I want not to quarrel with you. I was silly just now. I should have controlled myself better. We must come to some arrangement about this affair."

"I have already arranged to please myself," said John. "You are talking like a fool. You are pretending to be calm, but I can see all the time you're nothing of the sort. I am honest about it. I am *not* calm, and I don't pretend to be. I shall go out and try and get over it. You'd better try and get over it, too. I warn you I shall stand no more nonsense. I was ready to give way to you. I asked you to forgive me. You won't. Very well. There's an end of it. I can dispense with your forgiveness."

"Have you done? Then hear me," said Eva. "I cannot consent to live with you any longer. We must have a separation deed drawn up."

"Hoity-toity!" cried John.

"I am willing to share half of what remains of my fortune with you."

"Do you know," said John, "that you are talking utter rot?"

"I think not," she replied. "But Mr. Henson Cleogh will decide that. I have written to him."

John turned. He looked at her and flourished his hands in angry impotence.

"We will see," he said. "You are very clever, but your husband isn't a fool, either. Not that he wants to keep you. He says to you now, go and be damned! Go and drown yourself, hang yourself, what you will, so long as you leave him the price he sold himself for."

And thus speaking, he left her.

She stretched herself on a sofa, wearily, and laid her cheek on her hand. Presently, her husband descended the stairs again. She listened. He passed her door, singing softly to impress her with his indifference. She rose and ran to the window and looked out after him as he strode away down the street.

"Good-by, my husband," she whispered. "Good-by, my sweet!" And she laughed.

She went upstairs to her room and hastily packed all her

clothes in two large trunks. She took a huge bag and filled it with books from the library. Then she rang for Lizzie Glint.

"I am going away, Lizzie," she said.

"Yes 'm."

"Are you sorry?"

"Sorry 'm?"

"I shall not come back. My husband and I have agreed to separate."

"Separate, 'm! O, 'm!"

"I want to ask you, will you come with me or stay on here? Please yourself, my dear. But, if you come with me, you must make ready at once."

"There's my clo'es, 'm, not come home from the laundry yet, 'm."

"I will make that good."

Lizzie Glint hesitated.

"It seems such a hasty thing, 'm," she said.

Eva tapped impatiently upon the ground.

"You must decide at once, Lizzie," she said. "Because I want to be away from here in half an hour."

"I'll come, 'm."

"Thank you, thank you. I will see that you have no cause to regret it. Now run away and pack your things; and, when you have done that, call a cab."

Lizzie gasped, stared, and departed.

Eva sat down to write a letter to her husband. It was a hard matter and cost her much thought. This is what she wrote, finally:

I feel that I cannot live with you any longer. I am going away with no intention of returning to you. I will go first to Mr. Henson Cleogh and obtain his advice. He will write to you as to money arrangements; but I shall instruct him to keep my address secret, because I do not want to see you again. Neither will he forward letters from you to me; but will destroy them unopened, as I desire that there shall be no communication between us except through him. I ask that you will not molest my future life, as I will not molest yours. I shall never ask you to maintain me, though I have a right to ask it. I am not leaving you in anger, and I desire you no ill, but rather your welfare. If my forgiveness will help you to live better, you have it. Good-by. I take the child with me, of course.—EVA.

CHAPTER XXV

In a shabby room on the second floor of a house in Camberwell a woman was frying sausages over a wood-fire. She was young and plump and tiny: a pocket-edition of a woman, neatly bound in grey cloth. Her face was flushed with the heat and her exertions; it was a soft, homely face, weak in the mouth and chin. She had dark brown hair and dark brown eyes; her cheeks were full and round. A clock ticked on the mantel, and a canary sung in its cage near the window. On the table in the middle of the room a white cloth was spread, and covers laid for two.

The woman straightened her back and wiped her damp forehead.

"Ten past six," she said, looking at the clock, "and the sausages done to a turn. I hope he won't be late."

She removed the fryingpan from the fire and deftly transferred its contents to a deep white dish. This she set down in the fender and covered with a plate. She went to a little mirror on the wall and added a pink bow to the bib of her apron. The effect pleased her, and she laughed gaily.

"Now, my lord, come when you will," she said.

As she spoke she heard footsteps on the stairs. The door of the room was pushed open, and Dick Underton entered.

He was somewhat changed in appearance; he had grown a beard, and that, or something else indefinable, added strength to his face.

"Well, Sue," he said. "And how is sister Sue?"

"Ravenous," was the reply.

She took him by the facets of his coat and kissed him heartily. She was such a little woman that she had to tiptoe to reach his face with her lips.

"What a bristly old brother you are!" she said, rubbing her chin.

He doffed his hat and coat, and they sat down to eat.

"What glorified sausages!" said Dick. "How do you do 'em."

"It's all a matter of fork," she replied. "You wouldn't understand."

"Wouldn't I though?" he cried. "You don't know me. I rather fancy myself as a cook. I've fried hundreds of sausages in my time."

"Confess, now, did your sausages ever taste as good as these?"

"No, they didn't," he said. "But, then, you see, I hadn't you for sauce to 'em."

"Poor old boy! You must have been precious lonely."

"I was that. It makes it all the better now, though, so I don't mind. But you, Sue, all those miles away, working so hard, when you should have been with me."

"Never mind, Dick, it's all over now. . . . . Let me give you another."

"There's only one; we'll halve it."

"I don't want——"

"Then throw it in the fire. I sha'n't eat any more if you ain't going to."

She laughed and cut the sausage, but with a reckless disregard for the principles of true proportion.

"I say, Sue," said Dick, "I've got such good news for you."

"O!"

She dropped her knife and fork and clasped her hands. The canary trilled gaily.

"Old Cleogh's given me a rise."

"Dick, Dick!"

"We shall be able to have those curtains, eh?"

"And the hearthrug too!"

"And a new coffee-pot!"

"And some flowers for the window, Dick."

"He called me into his room this morning at about a quarter to eleven, just as I was starting to go West. He was very nice. Said he was glad to see me turning over a new leaf, and gave me a ten bob rise there and then. O, and the management of some Fire Agency business too.

That's as good as half a crown extra. And it isn't so much the rise, Sue, as—as——"

"I know, old boy."

"It shows he has confidence in me again. That's what delights me most."

"I'm so glad."

"If this goes on, we shall be awful swells in no time."

"Rather! But I always knew you'd get on, Dick. You're so clever. I always said it."

"Ah, Sue, I'm afraid you think too much of me."

"I don't. But if I do, it's only because I want you to think the same of me. . . . . Doesn't it seem funny that we should be parted all those years, now that we are together again? I can hardly believe it, somehow. I feel as if I had always lived here with you. And yet I was a gawky little girl last time you saw me, just going into service; and you were a gawky big boy. Now we are grown-up people. It's jolly queer and jolly nice. I believe I should fall in love with you, Dick, if you were anybody else's brother."

"Get out with you, Sue."

"Yesterday, when we were out together, I kept saying to myself, 'People will think he is my sweetheart, not my brother, and the girls will envy me.' I felt so pleased about it."

They both laughed. Dick rose and filled his pipe, and Sue cleared the table.

"I tell you what," said Dick, suddenly. "We ought to keep it up to-night."

"O!" cried Sue. "How?"

"We'll go to a theatre."

"Really, Dick?"

"Yes. By Jove, we will. Put on your best frock, Sue. Hurry up; there isn't much time. We'll go and see 'Revenge is Sweet' at the Parthenon. It's a rattling good thing. We can take a 'bus and be up there in no time. It wants ten to seven now."

"But—but, Dick."

"Yes."

"Can we afford it!"

"Bosh! you're only wasting time."

She ran away to dress herself.

"A lightning toilet, mind," Dick shouted after her.

He sluiced his head and hands over a bowl in a corner of the room and donned a new tie in honour of his sister and the occasion. Presently Sue came back, flushed with her ablutions, her eyes sparkling, her lips smiling saucily.

"A veil, too!" cried Dick.

"Dear me!" said Sue. "And why not pray? Really, Dick, you're awfully rude. You should never pass remarks on a lady's dress—not to her face, I mean. Of course——"

"Eh?"

"It isn't done, you know."

"None of your modish airs with me, miss!"

"Is my hat on straight?"

He surveyed her critically.

"No," he said, slowly. "Very crooked."

"It isn't, Dick."

"Very well, then."

"Is it?"

"I don't know."

"O, you goose! Never mind. Come along."

Sue put out the light and they crept downstairs, very softly, that they might not disturb the slumbers of their landlady's baby, who always chose inconvenient times for sleeping and waking. The season was summer.

"Just the right time of the year for riding on omnibuses," said Sue.

They rode on the box-seat, beside the driver. Sue found it a hard matter to climb up into her place, but the joy, once attained, was well worth the trouble involved.

"Isn't it a beautiful night?" said Sue.

"I say," he said, suddenly, "you mustn't go out charing any more, you know."

"Dick," she said, squeezing his hand, "you have a horrible coarse way of putting things. Anybody would think I was an ordinary charwoman to hear you. I am not that. I am an occasional domestic assistant, sleeping out, and working by the day."

"Don't put me off, Sue."

"Very well, Dick, but I must go out to-morrow. I have promised. And, really, Dick, I don't mind. It's what I've been used to. And I'm very strong."

"To-morrow's the last time, then."

"Yes, if you are set on it. But it seems so silly, because I've got nothing to do all day long, and——"

"What do you mean? Haven't you got my dinners to cook, and my socks to darn, and the rooms to tidy, and the beds to make? Nothing to do, indeed!"

"You're an old pet, Dick!"

There was a great business to get Sue down from her perch; but she laughed so much and so heartily at herself during the complicated operation, that even the hippopotamic driver forgot to be impatient.

There was a fair crowd gathered about the gallery doors of the Parthenon Theatre.

"Put your arms round my waist," said Dick.

"Which is your waist?" asked Sue.

"And clasp your hands firmly in front of me. Whatever you do, don't let go; and I'll answer for it, we shall get a good seat. This isn't the first time I've been in a crush at a theatre."

Sue obeyed his instructions. They had not long to wait. There was a noise of drawn bolts and the crowd heaved convulsively.

"Hold tight," said Dick.

She held tight. As he spoke the doors opened and there was a wild rush. With insidious elbow and stubborn shoulder Dick fought his way inch by inch, Sue clinging to him breathlessly, and crying out when it seemed to her that her brother's life was menaced. They won a good seat, as Dick had predicted, in the first row, and well away from the side.

"Oh, *look* at your collar!" cried Sue.

"I will," said Dick, "when I've done looking at your hat."

"Isn't it on straight?"

Sue was much distressed and must take it off and examine it.

"Not so bad as might be," she remarked, and restored it to its former splendour with a little careful manipulation of bows and feathers. Dick thought he had never seen anything prettier than her affectation of vanity. He was much interested in the play of her light fingers. Once she looked up and met his glance with such a roguish twinkle of her own brown eyes that he was ravished of admiration.

"Eh?" she said. "Do you really think so?"

He grinned.

"Do I think what?" he asked.

But she only shook an arch finger at him.

Presently the play started. Sue propped her chin on her fists and yielded her whole soul to enjoyment. She laughed and wept and trembled. Sometimes a little "Oh!" escaped her, and once she cried out "No, no!" quite shrilly, so that there was a ripple of mirth through the house. She hissed the villain, too, as heartily as any drunken labourer there; and applauded the nice people with strong vehemence. Between the acts she was haggard and restless and conjectural.

When the performance was ended and they were out in the streets again Dick suggested "Oysters." Sue assented, though she was greatly awed by the splendour of their proceedings, and Dick said they would go to the Acme Café Restaurant and Oyster Supper Bar.

"Is it as big as that?" Sue asked.

"As what?" said Dick.

"As—as it seems," she stammered, laughing.

"No," he replied. "It's quite a little place."

It was, indeed, a very little place and dingy, too; a small, beetle-browed shop, displaying in either window a pale brown tea-cake between two willow-pattern plates and a glass fly-trap. The double-doors were opened from within at their approach and a current of warm air rushed out to greet them, quite effusively. A withered sexton, oddly attired in a dress waistcoat and abbreviated Eton jacket, conducted them to a pew near the door. They sat down at a table covered with oil-baize, and Dick ordered two dozen oysters at tenpence. The sexton said: "Yes, sir," and covered half his mouth with his bony hand and coughed decorously.

"Rolls?" he inquired.

"Yes, please."

"And butter?"

"Yes; and a bottle of stout."

"Any particular brand for preference?" asked the sexton. He held his head aside and smiled as he said this and seemed to try to throw a note of devilry into the utterance; but, obviously, his heart was with his coffins. Dick was not particular as to the brand of stout; and the sexton took his decorous cough away up the aisle.

"What a funny old man!" Sue said to Dick.

"Ain't he," said Dick.

"*Aren't* we keeping it up?"

"Ain't we, though!" and her brother laughed.

They stared at one another across the table for the space of ten minutes; and then, nothing happening, Dick became impatient.

"Everything comes to him who waits except the waiter, it seems," he said.

He slid along his seat to the end of the pew and looked out. The sexton was warming himself before a meagre fire at the further end of the room. Seeing Dick's indignant face he cried out: "In a moment, sir."

"Hurry up," said Dick.

Sue said "S-sh!" and added quickly, "How can you?"

"That's all right," said Dick with a magnificent gesture of the hand. "These fellows have to be livened up a little."

The sexton, who had stayed to pile a little more earth on the corpse of the fire, now patted it down with a shovel, and caught up a tray and came toward them. He set out the repast with much circumstance, and they at once fell to and demolished the whole. Sue seemed surprised to find that dissipation was so sweet. Dick ordered yet another dozen oysters at tenpence and more stout. It was quite a debauch. At last they were satisfied. Dick flung down a sovereign and called for the bill. The waiter handed him his change, and Dick pushed back sixpence. To Sue the easy nonchalance of the whole proceeding was a matter for blank, blind amazement. She felt that she could never go to sleep again after this distension of her eyes.

CHAPTER XXVI

DESPITE her premonition, Sue slept excellently well after her evening of dissipation. It was nearly nine o'clock in the morning when she awoke, and she found that her brother had departed for the City already. He had fastened a note to the bread by means of a fork. The note said: "If you wake up soon enough, you will find some boiling water in the kettle on the fire and some toast in the oven. The toast may not be so golden as a sovereign or so crisp as a banknote, but—as Mercutio says—it will serve, I hope." Sue wondered who Mercutio was, as she rose and dressed herself with nimbly flying fingers; there never was a defter pair of hands! She ate her breakfast, slowly and thoughtfully. She was thinking that God must be good indeed to give her a brother here on earth and heaven hereafter.

She was soon out in the sun-stained streets and tripping fast along to overtake the day. By way of many shabby thoroughfares she came at last into a better neighbourhood where fewer children played in the roadway and there were even servants on some of the steps. Her destination was a house in this district.

She trembled somewhat as she knocked at the door, for she was an hour after her time. The loose-jointed household drudge who admitted her was not reassuring.

"Bless me, you *are* late!" she cried. "Missis has jest told me to send you up to her as soon as you come. I expect she'll jore you. She's got a very rough temper, and a tongue you could spit muffins with."

"O, dear!" said Sue. "Where is she?"

"Upstairs. I'll show you."

She led Sue up to a room on the first floor, and ushered her into the presence of her mistress.

"The domestic 'elp, 'm," she said.

"O, ah, yes," said Sue's employer.

She was a little woman, plump of person, but with a hard, grey face and white hair. Her eyes were hollow from much weeping. She wore a black, stuff gown and a large, housewifely apron.

"You're very late," she said to Sue.

"I'm very sorry, 'm, but——"

"It doesn't matter; I sha'n't employ you again, that's all. What's your name?"

"Susan Underton, 'm."

"Eh?"

The hard, grey face was suddenly quick with interest.

"Susan Underton."

"Underton. It's not a common name. Have you a brother named Dick?"

"Yes, 'm."

"What is he?"

"A clerk, 'm."

"Is he like you?"

"No, 'm; he's fair, with light eyes."

"Is he a little man with stiff hair and red ears?"

"No, certainly not," said Sue, resentfully. "He's a dear fellow."

"Eh? I beg you pardon. I am very anxious to know whether your brother is the same Dick Underton I knew. Tell me what he's like in your own words."

Sue did this. Dick's ears must have tingled sympathetically.

"It must be him," said the lady. "And you are his sister?"

"Yes, 'm."

"Do you think your brother would come and see me?"

"I'll ask him, 'm."

"Tell him it's John Coldershaw's mother wants to see him."

"Yes, 'm."

"Have you ever heard that name before?"

"No, 'm. I've only just lately come to live with my brother."

"Yes, yes. You mustn't mind me scolding you jest now. I've had a lot to sour me, and I never was careful with my tongue. Will you go and fetch your brother to me? I want to see him at once."

"He won't be home from business, 'm, till past six."

"Won't he? O, well, I suppose I must wait till then."

"Shall I start my work now, 'm?"

"No, don't do any work. Your brother wouldn't like it. He knew my son, and was often a visitor in this house."

Sue stood hesitating on the threshold of the room.

"What shall I do, then, 'm?"

"Can you read?"

"Yes, 'm."

"Well, come and read to me."

"What shall I read, 'm?"

"Eh? O, the Bible, of course. Something out of the Psalms."

Sue opened the book, turned its leaves, and started to read at haphazard from the Psalms. The chapter she lighted on was the eighty-sixth chapter. Sue read slowly and with care, fearing to commit mistakes. Her voice was very sweet.

"*Bow down Thine ear, O Lord, hear me: for I am poor and needy.*"

Mrs. Coldershaw averted her face, and crossed her hands on her breast in a rapt, devotional attitude. Sue read on:

"*Preserve my soul, for I am holy: O Thou my God, save thy servant that trusteth in Thee.*"

A tear, charged with self-pity, rolled down the face of Mrs. Coldershaw. Sue did not see; but read on to the end of the chapter. She was proceeding with "*His foundation is in the holy mountains;*" but Mrs. Coldershaw cried out to her to stop.

"That will be enough," she said. "You may go now, and thank you."

The face that she turned to Sue was full of proud sorrow; a hard, strong face, but with the trail of soft, weak tears upon it. The girl was moved at the sight of so much grief and would have lingered to say something kind; but Mrs. Coldershaw, seeing the pity in her eyes, was stung to sudden petulance.

"No, no. Go," she said.

Sue went out softly.

The desolate woman, left alone, sat brooding. She mur-

mured: "*O turn unto me and have mercy upon me; give thy strength unto thy servant, and save the son of thine handmaid.*" She attached to the words another meaning than that of the Psalmist. And she added, passionately: "O God, answer me quick!"

There came a tapping at her door.

"What is it?" she called out.

"May I come in?"

"Who are you?"

"Mr. McWirtrie."

"Yes, come in."

The minister entered, his florid face aggressively sympathetic under his bristling shock of hair and beard. He came forward with hand extended.

"I was passing, so dropped in," he said. "How are you?"

Mrs. Coldershaw shrugged her shoulders, implying that her health did not matter.

"It was a terrible loss for all of us," said the minister. "But we have consolation in knowing that he is not lost to us for ever, that we shall meet again out beyond."

"I'd give up all that for a day's heft of his hand, I think," said Mrs. Coldershaw. "I miss his body more than anything. His body was him to me."

"My dear Mrs. Coldershaw!"

"It doesn't seem to me that his soul matters a bit now his body is laid away. Do you know why I loved him?"

"Because he was your husband."

"That, of course; but more because he was such a nuisance about the place, dropping tobacco ash on everythink and stinking the place out with his dirty old pipes. There was thirty-five of his pipes left. I've put five in every room except the kitching, and ten in the droring-room where I never allowed him to smoke. But it ain't the same. I can sit down any time now and know that there ain't nothing being spiled by him anywhere. I used to foller him from room to room to tidy up his muddles. Now there ain't no HIM at all. He was worth the muddles."

"When you are more reconciled to your loss your thoughts will take a heavenlier turn."

"They won't, they'll get earthier and earthier—with him."

This was her mood, and against it the minister was

powerless. He went out sadly, praying for her under his breath.

When he was gone Mrs. Coldershaw crossed the landing outside her door and entered the little room that her son had been wont to use. It was as he had left it. A crowd of glasses and empty bottles stood in a corner, on a little table. There was a pile of sporting papers and manuals heaped on the floor, and kept in place by a pair of heavy dumb-bells. The walls were adorned with pipe-racks, sets of boxing-gloves, singlesticks, and foils, some portraits of actresses, race-horses, jockeys and pugilists; one or two crude sketches signed "J. C.;" and a faded photograph of John's mother done in the years of her youth. There were a great many chairs, shabby but supremely comfortable, and a sofa, and a card-table, besides a bookcase and a heavy solid sideboard with glass-doors, behind which were visible more bottles and glasses. There were cigar-boxes, some only half-empty, an infinity of pipes, tobacco-jars, corkscrews, packs of cards, a gay fez, two velvet coats, battalions of boots and slippers, and a wardrobe with one door ajar, revealing rows on rows of wearing apparel. A gun, a sword, a hunting-crop, a whip, a dozen sticks, were in a corner, grouped in an iron rack. A writing-table stood in the bay of the window, littered with papers. There was no dust anywhere. Mrs. Coldershaw took up a pipe, polished the silver band with her apron, and replaced it on the arm of the sofa where it was before.

"He might have only jest gone out," she said, looking about her. "My boy! I want to keep his room like that, now Simon is gone, too!"

She entered the room adjoining, which was furnished as a sleeping-apartment.

"Jack's bed," she said, smoothing the coverlet with her hand. "Little Jack's bed; big Jack's bed! My boy! It's all ready for him, clean and fresh and dry as he liked it. And his own special nice soap in the dish and his own pretty brushes and tooth-powder and all. And his razors——"

She wandered through the room, handling each thing that had been her son's, with loving fingers.

"Poor Simon was better than me," she said aloud, sitting down before the glass that had so often, too often, reflected her son's face. "But how my thoughts do run

between them two! It's Jack and it's Simon, it's Simon and it's Jack all the day long. But he was better than me, my poor old man. It was Jack at the last with him, as it was at the first with both on us. As it has been always."

In the evening Dick Underton came to the house as she had asked him. He was awkward in the presence of his old friend's mother, the more because her face told him that she had no light reason to desire the interview. She gave him her hand.

"If I seem short in my speech," she said, "please put it down to my being upset and not to any feeling of unfriendliness towards you. I have lately lost my husband."

"I am very sorry," Dick murmured.

"He caught a chill and it settled on his chest and caused congestion of the lungs," said Mrs. Coldershaw, with that curious, dry matter-of-factness characteristic of women of her class. "He died in a fortnight. It was six weeks ago."

"I am very sorry," Dick murmured again. "I always liked him, though I rarely saw him. He was a splendid man."

"He was a grown-up child," said Mrs. Coldershaw, smiling; "and that sort makes the best men, I always think."

"Yes," said Dick.

She was silent for a few moments.

"Dick," she said at last, "I will call you Dick because Jack did—I am afraid I used not to be quite just to you. I always thought that you led my boy astray, and I disliked you for it almost."

"It was no great injustice," Dick answered; "if I didn't lead him astray I didn't lead him anywhere else."

Mrs. Coldershaw's eyes sparkled.

"Of course not," she said, proudly. "I was a fool to think it. My son was born to be nobody's follower. He was his own law always."

Dick was silent.

"I want to make it up again with my boy," said Mrs. Coldershaw, suddenly. She spoke almost hoarsely, a faint flush reddening her grey cheeks. "And I don't want to seem to make the first advance, you understand. I am

his mother; it is his place to give in, not mine. Dick, you are his friend——"

"No," said Dick, interrupting her.

The animation of her manner faded. She seemed to shrivel and grow grey in the instant.

"Don't you know where he is?"

"Yes, I know that."

"When did you quarrel with him? Is it a quarrel?"

"I quarrelled with him, the last time, in this house, two years or more ago."

"I remember," she said. "But I thought you must have made it up since."

"No," said Dick.

"Don't you want to make it up?"

"I don't."

Mrs. Coldershaw stirred in her chair, gripping the arms hard. She was angry that Dick, her son's factotum, should speak so; but she controlled herself.

"How is that?" she asked.

"He behaved very cruelly to me," said Dick. "I have forgiven him, but I can't forget it. It will always be between us."

"But you see him sometimes to speak to. I mean as men do who ain't friends."

"No."

"When did you see him last?"

"That day, two years ago."

"Not since then."

"No."

Mrs. Coldershaw uttered a cry of disappointment.

"I thought you was sure to be able to help me," she exclaimed. "But you said you know where he is. Where is he?"

"Staying down the river just now, at a house in Staines."

Mrs. Coldershaw rose and fetched a sheet of paper and a pen and ink.

"Write it down," she said, trembling.

He hesitated.

"You must promise not to let anyone know who told you this," said Dick. "The information came to me in a business way, and I might get into trouble through telling. But I can't help it. I am so sorry for you."

"How is he? Is he well? happy? comfortable?"

"I should say so; but, you must remember, I haven't seen him."

"What has he been doing all this time?"

"Well," said Dick, slowly, "after he got married——"

Mrs. Coldershaw sprang up.

"What?" she cried.

"Did he never tell you?"

"This is the first I have heard of it. Who is she? But I know, I know. She is a dirty, foul trollop—a vulgar, gin-swilling——"

"Stop!" cried Dick angrily, imperiously. "You mustn't speak of her like that. Nothing can excuse it. She is a good woman, too good for your son."

"She—too good!" cried Mrs. Coldershaw, laughing shrilly.

"You cannot know her."

"There are letters from her among his papers. I have read them. Her name is Du Cane—Hetty Du Cane."

"That was only his mistress," said Dick, stung to resentment. "His wife was a pure, sweet girl, far too good for him. I repeat it."

"What is her name?"

"Her name was Eva Hardrop before she married Jack."

"I don't know her. What sort of a woman is she?"

"She is very beautiful, very clever, and very good."

"A friend of yours, evidently."

Dick put aside the sneer.

"No," he said. "I am merely clerk to her solicitor, Mr. Henson Cleogh. I saw her once two or three years ago. I have seen her again, lately. She has been at the office a good deal during the last month."

Mrs. Coldershaw was a little awed to hear that her son's wife employed a solictor.

"Tell me all about it," she said.

Dick told her in a few short sentences.

"I should like to see her," said Mrs. Coldershaw. "Are there any children?"

"One."

"A girl or a boy?"

"I think it's a boy, but can't be sure."

"Do they live at——" she referred to the paper on which Dick had written the address—"at Staines?"

Dick did not answer at once.

"Or are they only staying there for a time?" asked Mrs. Coldershaw.

"They—they are living apart," said Dick, at last. "They quarrelled and separated."

"What did she do?"

"Nothing that was not right and womanly. It was him that went wrong."

"There must have been something about her to drive him to it."

"There was not," said Dick, emphatically. "She is one of the best women in the world."

"I am tired of hearing you say that," said Mrs. Coldershaw, wearily. She leaned back in her chair. "I can't understand it at all," she murmured. "I must go and see him."

She lapsed into silence.

"Good-by," said Dick.

She started and gave him a frigid hand. She did not offer him any entertainment, or thank him in a less substantial way. She had got him and used him and let him go. Dick descended the stairs in an ill-humour; but he was dimly, vaguely sorry for John's mother, notwithstanding.

CHAPTER XXVII

In the early morning Mrs. Coldershaw arose and made preparation for a journey. She had not slept; her face was haggard and her head ached with fruitless thought. She drew apart the curtains of her bedroom-window and looked out. It was a dull, damp day; the sky threatened rain. She dressed hurriedly and went downstairs.

The house was filled with smoke. Mrs. Coldershaw called the servant, angrily.

"Where is all this smoke coming from?" she asked.

"From the kitching fire, 'm."

"It's enough to blind anybody."

"I'm glad to hear you say so, 'm. I has to work in it every morning reg'lar."

"You should have it seen to."

"I've mentioned it to you a dozen times, 'm."

"Don't answer me like that."

"Like what?"

"You're a saucy hussy. I won't have it."

"Begging your pardon, 'm," replied the girl, putting her arms akimbo; "but I'll ask you to recall them words or take a month's notice. I'm not one to be browbeaten by nobody, so don't think it. Anybody 'd think you paid me thirty pun a year to hear you carry on."

"I'll box your ears, you little minx, if you talk to me like that again!"

"Box my ears, will you, eh! I'd like to see you at it."

Mrs. Coldershaw raised her hand and struck the girl across the face.

"There," she said.

The girl staggered back with a shriek and then started to cry.

"All right," she said, between her sobs. "I'll show you. You ain't going to knock me about like a slave. I'll have the law on you for this, see if I don't, you brute. I'll

let the neighbours know what sort of a Christian you ar to ill-treat a pore gel because she won't let you put upo her."

Mrs. Coldershaw was honestly sorry that she had struc the girl; but she did not say so. She turned away with harsh laugh and shut herself in the dining-room.

"Little fool!" she said. "What did she want to mak me do that for?"

"You can get your own breakfast this morning," th girl shouted through the keyhole. "I won't do anothe stroke, see if I do. I'm a-going home to my people. I' tell 'em about you. Perhaps you won't feel so clever whe you get a summons."

"Go away," said Mrs. Coldershaw.

"Never fear, I'll go away quick enough," answered th girl. "*I* don't want to stop in your house. I wish I' never set foot in it, I do. The gel what was here befor warned me against you. She told me what a rotten, stingy mean, old hag you was!"

Mrs. Coldershaw forbore to answer, and the girl wer upstairs, sobbing. She overturned the chairs in her littl bedroom and dragged her trunk across the floor, bumpin the furniture and shaking the house. Every fresh nois aggravated Mrs. Coldershaw's mood of irritation; she wa all the more annoyed because she could find no excuse fo herself. She raged up and down the room, plucking at he dress, her hands, her hair, fuming and fretting in an acces of fierce exasperation. She felt empty, weary, feverish; sh was racked with aching unrest, torn, distraught, at war wit herself and the world. She went downstairs to the kitche to prepare her own breakfast, in the servant's defaul There the acrid smoke stung her eyeballs and clogge her mouth. The tears oozed from her smarting eyes; sh sneezed and coughed till her stomach was sore. She fille a kettle with water and set it on the coals; it toppled o its side and the fire went out in a cloud of steam. Near half an hour was wasted in re-lighting it and then th smoke poured out into the room again, blinding an choking her. The water boiled at last, and she made a po of tea and set it on the hob to brew. She cut some slic of bread and knelt down before the fire to make toas She could not find a toasting-fork and used a dinne fork instead. The heat scorched her face and finger

but she persevered, not because she was hungry, but because she knew that she needed food. At last she sat down to eat. But it was an unfortunate repast, and unappetizing. The tea was sour with soot and fumes; her hand had trembled agitatedly in the toast-making, and the bread was bitter where it had been burned on the hot bars of the grate. Her palate refused the meal; and shame impelled her to bury the toast in the overflowing dust-bin and throw away the spoilt tea, lest her servant should spy out the evidences of her incompetency and triumph over her.

She was ascending to her bedroom again when she met her servant coming down the stairs, fully attired in outdoor costume.

"Where are you going?" asked Mrs. Coldershaw.

"Where do you think?" snapped the girl. "Why, home, of course. I'm going to fetch a cab to take away my trunk. I've just packed it."

"You can't go to-day. I shall be out till the evening."

"I shall go when I like. And I don't care nothing about where you'll be."

"What a stupid girl you are!"

"Am I! Well, that's a matter of fancy, ain't it? I think I should be stupider still if I stopped here to be knocked about by you. Try it on again, that's all."

"Oh, go, go, then."

"Yes, I will go, go, then."

They passed on the narrow stairs. The girl went out, slamming the street-door. Mrs. Coldershaw sat down before the mirror on her dressing-table and whimpered like a child. Presently, the girl returned with a cab and the cabman carried down her trunk. She stopped outside Mrs. Coldershaw's door to say: "I sha'n't forget the summons, 'm." And she and the cabman laughed. The street-door was slammed again, and there was silence.

Mrs. Coldershaw arose and cleansed her hands and washed the tearmarks from her face. She donned her smartest bonnet and shawl, locked the door of each room, and barred and closed the shutters throughout the house. Then she, too, went out.

Rain was beginning to fall and a keen wind blew. The roads were thick with slush, the pavements were caked with sticky, slippery mud. A damp, white mist hung low

in the streets. Mrs. Coldershaw gained a main thoroughfare, and hailed an omnibus. But there was no room inside, and the conductor affected shortsightedness. All the omnibuses were full inside. She walked to the nearest stopping-point on the route, hoping to find a vacant place in one of the vehicles there; but already a crowd, similarly minded, was gathered. Her dress was trodden on and torn in the "gathers"; her bonnet was knocked aside and crushed. She escaped from the struggle, crumpled and almost at the point of tears. A cabman, observing her distress, threw up a finger of invitation. "Keb, mem?" he cried. "Yes," she answered, desperately, and the cab drove up. She climbed in, her dress falling across the muddy wheel, and sat down trembling, for she had not ridden in a cab before and it seemed a wicked act. She gave the driver the direction, "Waterloo Station." He cracked his whip, the horse crouched on its lean haunches, and they started through the streets. The ride was short. Mrs. Coldershaw determined to be generous and handed the cabman a sixpence.

"What the 'Ell is this?" he asked, holding it out under her nose.

"Sixpence," faltered Mrs. Coldershaw.

"'Old my mare a minute, mate," said the cabman, throwing the reins to a shabby bystander. He climbed down, and came and stood over Mrs. Coldershaw, scowling.

"Now, Missis 'Ayseed," he said; "what do you mean by giving me a bloomin' tanner for a ride of over two miles?"

"I don't believe it can be more than that," said Mrs. Coldershaw, stoutly.

"Look here, mem," said the cabman, "I don't wanner be nasty about it. Gimme another tanner and you can have the keb an' mare an' all."

"I don't want them," said Mrs. Coldershaw, not realising his words in her agitation of spirit.

A policeman strolled up to the crowd that was already gathered and took control of the matter. He ordered Mrs. Coldershaw to pay another shilling, which she did, though very reluctantly. The crowd hooted her and the cabman said: "Hi, you've forgot to take the keb an' mare wi' you!"

She went into the booking-office to buy her ticket, and wandered out into the great bleak terminus. The hurry and hubbub stunned her. She was tossed in the crowd as a ship that has lost its rudder is tossed in the sea. She felt giddy and sick. At last, a boy to whom she appealed for guidance led her to her train. It was on the point of starting. The guard thrust her into the first available carriage, a first-class compartment. She nestled down among the cushions with a sigh of huge satisfaction. Her neighbour, a lady, sniffed scornfully, and drew away her skirts from contact with Mrs. Coldershaw's muddy dress. Another occupant of the carriage coughed approbation of the act. Mrs. Coldershaw then became aware that her intrusion was likely to be resented. She looked down at her soiled garments, wiped her hot, wet face with her handkerchief, and tried to straighten her bonnet and arrange her dishevelled hair. The misadventures of the morning had touzled her woefully, and she realized it. But she was not broken in spirit, and met the eyes of her offended companions boldly enough.

At the first stopping-place, the gentleman who had coughed called the guard, and whispered in his ear at the window.

"Certainly, sir," said the guard. "Hi, you," addressing Mrs. Coldershaw, "come out of that. You haven't got a first-class ticket, I lay."

Mrs. Coldershaw had not. She rose, trembling wrathfully, and stepped out of the carriage. She climbed into a third-class compartment, and the train started again.

Soon a weariness oppressed her. Her eyelids closed, and she fell into a light, uneasy sleep. Her head drooped on her breast and her umbrella slipped from her grasp to the floor. The wind blew through the open window on her wet hair; she shivered in her dreams.

She slept on, unheeding, till someone awoke her and asked:

"I say, where do you want to go to?"

"Staines," she answered.

"That was seven or eight stations back. You'd better get out here and try to catch a train up. Look sharp, or we shall be off again."

"Thank you, thank you," she said, and rose and quitted the train, hastily.

She stood on the platform in the pelting rain, dazed with sleep, but full of trouble. She had left her umbrella in the train. She asked an official:

"When is the next train back to Staines?"

"Four-twenny-five," was the reply. "You've got two hours and a half to wait."

"Two hours and a half!" gasped Mrs. Coldershaw.

"Ah!"

"Thank you, thank you," she said, and hobbled feebly to a seat, and sat down.

But she was cold and hungry, and there seemed no shelter anywhere from the cruel rain. She thought she would go and buy something to eat. She could see a few houses in the near vicinity and smoke ascending from them. Beyond, in the middle distance, was the river, a belt of haze between two hemispheres. She had to traverse a flooded road to reach the village; the water poured in over her boots, and the heavy clay hung to her heels and stained her dress anew. She found two dingy inns; but she would not set foot within them, for her soul's sake. There were no other places of public refreshment. She had abandoned her quest and was returning to the station when she passed an open door, and, looking aside, saw a bright fire burning in a cosy room and an old woman sitting over it. A tiny child was crawling on the hearth. Mrs. Coldershaw turned back and set a foot over the threshold. The old woman looked up.

"Go away," she said.

"I am ill with hunger and faint with cold. Won't you let me in?"

"No, go away. We've had to do with your sort before."

"I am an old woman like you."

"More shame to you. Go away."

"I am not poor."

The old woman lifted her chin.

"Eh?" she crooned.

"I am not poor. I can pay for what I want."

"Come in, come in. Lord bless me! why didn't you say so before. I thought you was one of them naught-fearing tramps."

Mrs. Coldershaw went to the fire and basked in its warmth. The old woman crossed the room, and shut the

door. A kettle sang on the hob and the table was spread for tea.

"Sit down, sit down," said the old woman. "I'll fetch another plate and cup and saucer, and you shall jine me in a quiet dish o' tea."

Mrs. Coldershaw stooped and caught up the child that was crawling on the floor.

"Is it yours?" she asked.

"God bless me! how should it be? No, no, I mind him, that's all. He'd be a dreadful worry to some, but as I'm paid to mind him, I don't mind him." She chuckled. "Eh, my dear?" she said.

Mrs. Coldershaw looked in the baby's face.

"It's a dreadful thing to be a woman," she said, "and have babies. Having babies is like having troubles."

"Yes, yes, yes," said the old woman. "Sorrow was born wi' Cain, I reckon. But have some tea."

Mrs. Coldershaw ate with ravenous avidity. The old woman was garrulous, and told her much scandal. When the meal was ended, they drew up to the fire and spread their skirts to the blaze.

"You're in a powerful muck," said the old woman.

"Can you lend me a brush? And I should like to wash and do my hair."

"You shall, my dear. Where are you going?"

"To Staines."

"By the four-twenny-five?"

"Yes."

"What for? Not a-visiting, surely?"

"I'm going to see my son. I ain't seen him for more than two years."

"Has he been abroad, then?"

Mrs. Coldershaw hesitated.

"Yes," she answered, slowly.

"Is he ill?"

"No."

"Do he expect you?"

"No."

"Ain't it a queer day for a journey like that?"

"I couldn't wait."

"No, no; no, no."

Mrs. Coldershaw looked at the old woman and her heart expanded.

"I'm going to save him," she said.

"Save him?"

"Save him from sin! . . . He loves me. He will listen to me. He has done wrong, but he will repent now. He will turn from his sin at the sight of me. I shall win him back to pray at my knee again. . . . Who knows?"

"Ah, who knows, indeed!"

"What is two years? We don't change much in two years. His heart's the same, though his deeds may be bad as bad. He will listen to his mother. I shall save him!"

The old woman was silent.

Mrs. Coldershaw repaired, as well as might be, the ravages in her attire.

"You ain't afraid as he'll be ashamed of you, are you?" the old woman asked, observing her visitor, shrewdly.

"No, no," was the reply. "But I owe it to him . . . . May I go to sleep for a bit? I could sleep very well in that armchair. You will wake me up in time for the train?"

The old woman promised, and Mrs. Coldershaw sat down and closed her eyes. She slept soundly until she was aroused. She thanked the old woman, and paid her and departed.

It was still raining hard. The roads showed like silver ribbons amid the green. The trees were bowing to the fury of the rising wind. Mrs. Coldershaw sped to the station through the heavy mud. The train was not yet arrived. She went into the waiting room; but no fire was there and a window was raised and jammed hard. The concentrated bleakness of the room was worse than the howling inclemency of the open platform. There was no one else travelling by the train, and Mrs. Coldershaw had one whole compartment for her own use. She did not dare to be comfortable, lest she should fall asleep again; but sat forward on the extreme edge of the seat. She drew out and read the slip of paper bearing John's address in Staines, which Dick Underton had left with her.

"My boy!" she murmured, and put it to her lips. Her heart was lighter with thought of him.

The rain was still falling when she reached Staines, but there was a crazy fly outside the station and she

climbed into it. She gave the driver the address on the paper.

"That's on the other side of the river," he said. "I'll take you down to the stage, if you like. Then you must get into the ferry."

"All right," she said; and he drove her down to the river. She gave him eighteenpence in payment, though the distance traversed was not half a mile.

"You'll get a ferry jest over there," he said, pointing with his whip; "or you can walk down to the bridge, if you like, but it's a goodish distance. There ain't no other way."

She went down to the bank of the river; but there were only empty boats there. The rain was lashing the water into froth and the wind was driving the spray. She stood, helplessly gazing, the black feathers in her bonnet drooping sadly; her crape sodden with wet, her draggled skirts cracking and snapping in the wind. At last, an amphibious creature, in a great, shining hat came blundering down to her from an inn, twenty yards away.

He offered to take her across for half a crown. She was too miserable to chaffer with him, and then he said there would be sixpence extra for beer-money. He helped her into his crazy boat and sprang in after her. He was very drunk, very foul, very reckless. He punted and rowed by turns, singing the whole time, or shouting coarse salutations to dim, indistinct figures on either shore. She told him where she wanted to go, and he said he would put her down opposite the house for an extry bob. She protested feebly and he said:

"Very well, then; I'll take you up to London for nothink."

"I'll pay the shilling," said Mrs. Coldershaw.

"No," he said, "I won't have it now. I'll take you up to London for nothink."

He sat down with a jerk and, seizing both oars, started to row with the stream, bending his broad back to the work with a will. Mrs. Coldershaw cried out to him to stop, that she would pay anything.

"Then it'll be five bob altogether," he said.

He altered his course and rowed her to the shore. She paid him with a trembling hand, and he helped her to alight from the boat.

"That's the house," he said, as he pushed away. "Right opposite you, wi' the red blinds."

She went up to the door with a throbbing heart and raised her hand to the knocker. But she let it fall to her side again. The weak tears started to her eyes. "I am so dirty and untidy," she thought. "There may be friends with him and I should shame him." Then her mood altered. "But I am his mother," she added, aloud, and raised her hand again and knocked.

A woman came to the door.

"Well?" she said.

"I want Mr. John Coldershaw."

"He doesn't live here now. He went away two days ago."

"He *must* live here," said Mrs. Coldershaw, her face hard with despair. "Don't tell me lies. I am his mother."

"I knew he couldn't be of much account," was the reply, "with his drinking and swearing and swaggering, and his gay women and flash friends, and his midnight parties a-bringing discredit on my house, what has always been so respectable before. You should ha' brought your son up better, Mrs. Coldershaw."

"I——"

But the door was shut and the forlorn mother turned away. She walked along the shore, quite aimlessly, her eyes on the dreary river. The wind was stronger than ever, but there were rifts in the clouds and the rain had abated somewhat. By-and-by, she left the river and entered the town. She had resolved to relinquish her quest for that day and return at once to London. The resolve brought her comfort. She went into a humble coffee-shop and sat down at a table near the fire to dry her sodden clothes. She asked the waitress if there were any station on that side of the river from which she could go to London.

"The nearest one is on the other side," replied the woman, "but you can easy go by the bridge."

Mrs. Coldershaw detailed her adventures since arriving in Staines, and the woman said that the fly-driver and the ferryman had both imposed upon her.

"The station ain't more than ten minutes walk from here by the bridge," said the woman, and proceeded to instruct her in the direction. Mrs. Coldershaw ordered some tea

and drank it gratefully. The warmth induced drowsiness and she again fell asleep. She was not disturbed and slept till the dusk. She awoke much refreshed, and going out discovered that it was no longer raining. The moon was shining on the water and the wind had grown tired. She hurried through the streets, eager to be home again. Her enterprise seemed a mad thing now and she was ashamed for her folly. She prayed that she might not come to expiate it by her death, but she felt fit to die of the hard privations of the day. She looked into the lighted windows of the houses and wished that she, too, were snug within four walls.

As she was passing through a lane at the back of some semi-detached villas, she met a postman, whistling blithely, and the impulse seized her to ask him if he knew the name of Coldershaw.

He echoed the name. "Let me see," said he. "Why, of course. It's the last house but one down this road—a house with a greenery at the back. You can't miss it."

She thanked him and pursued her way with a heart resurgent. She would see her son yet; her enterprise had not been bootless. She came to the house indicated and stopped at the gate. As she stood hesitating, she saw a man come to a window on the ground floor of the house. She could not see his face, for the light was behind him, but it was her son's form and pose. She stood looking; but, having thrown up the window, he moved away. A faint sound of voices came to her from the room in which he was. Her heart bounded, for she was sure that it was indeed her son whom she had seen. She forgot everything. She wanted only to see him again. There was a little garden between her and the window; she pushed open the gate of it and walked up the narrow path toward the house. As she advanced the sound of voices grew louder and became more distinct; there was a man and a woman engaged in the talking, and the man's voice was the voice of John Coldershaw. His mother could not doubt it. She drew nearer to the window which was almost on a level with the ground and peeped in through the wisteria that in part obscured it.

She saw a large, well-furnished room, with a table in its centre, strewn with the broken remnants of dinner. At

one end of the table sat a woman, dark, pretty, palp underbred and foolish. She was in extravagant even dress; her bosom was bare and her arms also; they red, coarse arms below the elbow, and by contrast neck and shoulders seemed wonderfully pure and w Before the fire, standing with his legs wide apart and his l forward, was John Coldershaw. He wore a suit of ro light tweed, and was smoking a black pipe. The l was strong on his face. His mother, looking at him u her hand was struck with the alteration in him. He grown stouter. He was handsome still, but the fresh of his youthful beauty was gone. His face, that had l tinted delicately, was coloured a uniform pink now; lips had lost their stiffness; the skin about his eyes loose and dark.

He spoke.

"My dear Alice," he said, "you talk like a fool."

"O, I hate you!" said the woman.

"That makes what I'm going to say all the easier."

"What are you going to say?"

He sucked at his pipe, but did not reply immediately

"Go on," said the woman, impatiently. "Out it."

"You have been accusing me of stinginess la I won't buy you things, you say. Well, frankl can't."

"Can't! Why not?"

"Haven't any money."

"Borrow some."

"Haven't any security."

"Then draw a cheque or give a bill or something."

He smiled. "As I said before, my dear Alice, you like a fool."

She gave him a curious glance, compounded of res ment and fear.

"What are we to do, then?" she asked.

"Do you want to know, really?"

"Of course."

"But if I propose something unpleasant?"

"It's bound to be that, I suppose. Most ways of ma money is unpleasant, ain't they."

"My dear Alice, your grammar sometimes is, really much."

"Bother my grammar! You never said nothing about it at first. And my grammar's as good as your morals, any day."

"Never mind about that."

"All right. Go on. Let's have the proposal."

He hesitated a moment and she moved her head peevishly.

"Well, then," he said, "since you will have it, my proposal is that we part."

Her face grew pale. She stared at him with startled eyes.

"Part!" she whispered. "How do you mean?"

He shrugged his shoulders. "Part for good, of course," he said.

She still stared at him.

"But what use would that be?" she asked.

"It would halve my expenses anyway," said John.

She smiled wryly with a hard, wide distension of her white lips."

"How about mine?" she said.

"Yours?" He laughed. "Come," he said, "that's too ingenuous."

She uttered a queer little cry that trailed off into a laugh.

"What do you say to it?" he asked.

"What can I say?"

"Say what you think."

She paused a moment, and her face quivered. "That's what I think?" she said, and burst into tears.

He snapped his fingers impatiently.

"What are you crying for?" he asked.

She did not answer him.

"Well, I'm damned!" he said. "We men need be wise to cope with the folly of women."

"Yes," said she, looking up. "Ain't we fools?"

"Look here," he said. "I think this is beastly ungrateful after the way I've treated you. And you knew it had to come to this."

"I didn't," she said, hotly. "How *should* I know? You never told me?"

He whistled softly.

"Couldn't you see?" he asked.

"I couldn't see nothing except you."

"I don't know what to say to that," he said. "It's flattering, of course; but—well, you've got over it."

"Got over it?"

"Don't you hate me? You said you did."

"Did I?"

"Wasn't it true!"

"Jack!"

He looked at her under his eyelids.

"Well, I suppose I ought to be sorry, but I'm damned glad," he said. "The vanity of the beast, I suppose. Still, it makes things rougher for you."

She rose and came over to him and put her head on his breast. He kissed her.

"There, little girl," he said, and pushed her away. "I'm sorry."

"You won't talk about us parting any more?"

"Eh? O, I must. Don't you understand? I'm broke. I can't afford to keep you now."

"Ain't you clever enough to get some more money?"

He frowned.

"Look here, Alice," he said. "I want you to be reasonable. When I took you up what did I say?"

"You kissed me."

"You were in my service—in my wife's service—a common—no, an uncommon—domestic. I liked the look of you. I gave you some beads and things, and I suppose you got rather fond of me. That was all right. But you went and did a silly thing, gave the whole affair away to my wife. Your head was turned, I suppose. The result was a fearful row and an upset of everything. And what did I do? I stuck to you. I said, 'Come with me and have a good time.' You came, and you've had it. I've shown you round everywhere, and shared my money with you. Now I am broke and the thing has got to end."

"Why?"

"Don't keep on saying 'Why' like that. I've told you the reason."

"It's no reason to me," she said. "Why can't we go on until you get some more money?"

"Because we can't, and there's an end of it."

"Why—no. But, Jack, I could help you to get money."

"You! How?"

"I could sell some of the things you've given me."

"Rot! Gentlemen don't allow that kind of thing."

"I can't part with you, Jack."

"You must; there's no help for it."

"But if I refuse to go?"

"I hope you won't be so silly . . . . What was that noise outside the window?"

"Jack, I do refuse to go."

He scowled.

"Don't be a fool!" he said. "You're more like a child than a woman. I shall get angry with you in a minute."

"I don't want to make you angry," she said; "but you are very cruel."

He laughed.

"What do you think will become of me?" she said.

"O, you'll be all right. I'll give you something to make a start with. And you know old Mac's——"

She cried out, hoarsely.

"How dare you say that?" she said.

"I daresay what I please to you," he replied, angrily. "I'm sick of this damned foolishness."

"I know what you mean," she exclaimed. "You mean you're sick of me."

"Have it your own way," he said.

"No, no. I didn't mean that. It was wrong."

He turned on her.

"It was right," he said.

"You don't mean it, Jack. You say it because I made you wild."

"I do mean it."

"No, no, no."

"I do."

She sat down at the table and laid her head among the dishes and sobbed. John regarded her with moody eyes.

"You brought it on yourself, you know," he said. "You can't blame me. I did my best to spare you . . . . What *was* that?"

He went over to the window and looked out.

"It's so blasted dark I can't see anything except the reflection of the room," he said. "A cat, I suppose?" He stooped and put out his hand; but his eyes were un-

accustomed to the darkness and he could see nothing. He returned to the fire.

"I like this blend of cool night and warm room," he said.

Alice Shallers continued to sob with her head among the dishes

"Come," said John. "Cheer up"

She lifted a white face, seamed with the marks of her fingers, and shining with her tears.

"I hate you," she said.

He poured out a glass of wine.

"Have a drink," he said. "And don't be so inconsistent."

She struck the glass from his hand with her clenched fist. The wine bespattered his face, and the glass shivered into splinters on the fender. He swore at her and raised his hand. She caught up a knife.

"Put it down," he said.

"I won't," she answered him.

"You're behaving like a mad thing."

"I am mad. You've done it. I was all right before. What did you want to come and tempt me to sin for, you devil?"

He laughed.

"I hope some one will treat your sister as you've treated me," she said.

"I haven't a sister."

"You wouldn't care if you had."

"Damn me! I don't believe I should."

"What was your mother? She couldn't ha' been a woman. . . . . Get away." She flourished the knife, and he retreated. "Now, you coward!" she said, "I will tell you what your mother was."

"Go on," he said. "I don't care a damn about my mother either. I don't care a damn for anything in heaven or earth or hell except myself. . . . . Hark!"

He held up a finger and listened. The wind swept by, and a few twigs, snapped from their parent branches by the rain, rattled on the gravel of the garden. There was no other sound. He crossed over to the window and stepped out. The moonlight was on the laurels and the flowers. He looked about, but there was no one. The garden-gate stood open.

Alice Shallers sobbed out her heart in the room behind him; he could hear the sound of her weeping. Adown the lane his mother, blind with tears, was running through the mire and mist, away from him. He stood bareheaded under the stars, and was not ashamed.

END OF THIRD STAGE

Fourth Stage

Madame Eva

CHAPTERS XXVIII–XXXVI

CHAPTER XXVIII

THE room was a riot of colour. The floor was thick with fragments of stuffs of divers hues—gorgeous silks, heavy satins, rich massy velvets, filmy muslins, crépons, crinolines, glassy bombazines, alpacas, cashmeres, silesias, delaines and sober serges; there were shimmering *moirès antiques*, flowered brocades, sarcenet, Pongee, and poplin; some tags of gimp and some loose beads twinkled amid the medley of material; and iridescent filaments, flying loose, fluttered over the wild disarray like glorified worms. The room was large and airy, with a northern aspect. The walls were hung with fashion-plates, and sample stuffs, and files of bills and other memoranda. There were many small tables, and a tacking-board, and sewing machines. Some cups of tea and plates of sandwiches stood on the floor and tables, in dangerous proximity to the delicate fabrics. There were ten young women working in the room, and the hubbub of conversation was considerable. It was so considerable that Mr. Henson Cleogh knocked thrice at the door without effect. He could hear the chatter within very distinctly; and perhaps that is why he waited and knocked again and again, instead of entering at once. At last professional considerations impelled him to thrust in his head and waste no further time. There was a little concerted shriek, the sudden crack of a snapped machine-needle, and silence.

"Is Madame Eva there?" asked Mr. Cleogh, fixing his glasses across his nose.

Some one answered, "No."

"O!"

He pondered.

"Miss Underton?"

"Yes, Mr. Cleogh."

The speaker was Sue, grown a little older and plumper.

"I should like a word with you."

Sue put aside the work on which she was engaged and came toward the lawyer. He shook hands with her very cordially.

"Come into the other room," she said, and led the way to a smaller apartment on the same floor. She handed Mr. Cleogh a chair, and he sat down.

"And how is Madame Eva?" he asked.

"O, very well indeed."

"You seem busy."

"We are—*very* busy."

"Are you well?"

"Quite well, Mr. Cleogh."

"I came about various little matters that require immediate attention. When will Madame Eva be in?"

"Very soon, I expect. She has gone to try on Lady Garsh."

"I like the sound of that 'Lady Garsh.'"

"She isn't the only 'lady' we do for."

"Madame Eva prospers, eh?"

"I should think so. She's so clever, you see, so original. Every day her connection extends. We're taking new premises soon."

"Indeed! And how do you like working for Madame Eva?"

"It is splendid! She is so kind. I would do anything for her. It was very good of you to mention me to her. I knew hardly anything of dressmaking, either. I don't know much now, though Madame Eva says I am indispensable. . . . . I owe it all to you, Mr. Cleogh."

"Nonsense! I did it to please your brother. It cost me nothing. And I acted in Madame Eva's interests as much as I did in yours. I merely followed my instructions, which were to look for an honest woman. Diogenes looked for an honest man with a lantern; I looked for an honest woman with a lawyer's clerk, and he found his sister. Ha, ha!"

He pinched her cheek. She drew back, blushing.

"Nonsense!" he said. "I am old enough to be your father. And yet, eh, perhaps I could give a point or two to some young ones still."

"I think I can hear Madame Eva coming up," said Sue. "Hark!"

The door opened, and a handsome, well-dressed woman

entered the room. She gave her hand to Mr. Cleogh and begged him to excuse her while she whispered some directions to Sue.

"We are so busy, you know," she said. "And if I get these matters off my mind first, I can give you my better attention."

Her manner was courteous, but brisk and almost hard.

"Now," she said, when Sue had departed. "Now I can talk to you."

"It's about these wretched people who won't pay up," he began.

"O, sue them, sue them," she said. "Don't waste your time and mine. People who like pretty dresses should pay for their vanity."

"One of them," said Mr. Cleogh, "is the wife of an M.P."

"Sue her," said Madame Eva.

"Two of them promise to pay as soon as they are able."

"Sue them."

"One says she has never been written to by a lawyer before, and she shall certainly warn her friends against you."

"She almost deserves to have her bill abated; but, no, sue her."

"Another reminds you that she has recommended two other customers to you."

"Neither of whom has paid. Tell her I forgive her, but must have my money. Are there any others?"

"Four more."

"Sue them all."

"Very good."

Mr. Cleogh wrote something in a pompous note-book.

"Come, now, don't you think I am rather a hard woman?" asked Madame Eva, smiling.

"I—I think you have a good head for business."

"If I were a baker," said Madame Eva, "I would let some of them off, perhaps. But, being a dressmaker I have a fancy to reform people at their own expense."

"To be sure."

"Isn't it clever of me?"

"It is most clever."

"But you still think me a hard woman?"

"I don't," he answered, earnestly. "I know you better than that."

"Thank you," she said. "Now you shall have some tea with me. O, you must!"

"Very well, then."

"I'll ring for it."

"Permit me."

He forestalled her.

"And how are the little ones?" he asked, sitting down.

"O, splendidly, thanks. To-day is Queenie's birthday. There's to be a little jollification to-night. Will you come? Do."

"Well," he said, "perhaps I will. Let me see, how old is the little maid?"

"Four years."

"Then it is over four years since you—since you——"

"Since I parted from Mr. Coldershaw. Yes, four years and four months. There is a year between Queenie and King."

"Four years!" murmured Mr. Cleogh. "It doesn't seem as long as that."

"It seems like all my life to me," said Madame Eva. "I never think of that other time."

"And have you not seen your husband——"

"Call him Mr. Coldershaw. Yes; I saw him once soon after we parted. He was in a cab in Regent Street. I saw him again, two years ago, in a theatre. We have not spoken. I am not sure that he saw me either time. If he is as happy in his new life as I am in mine, I expect we shall never meet again. I hope we never shall. . . . Ah, here is tea, a much pleasanter matter for discussion than husbands. Do you take sugar?"

The talk turned on other things.

"You will come to the jollification, won't you?" said Madame Eva, when Mr. Cleogh rose to go.

"I cannot promise," he said; "but I will do my best."

He departed and she went into the workroom. As she entered one of the young women slipped something under the skirt she was stitching.

"What was that, Miss Clark," asked Madame Eva.

"A book, madame," said the girl, blushing.

"A novelette?"

"Yes, madame."

"Fie, Miss Clark, you should know better. Why even a novelette heroine doesn't read novelettes!"

Miss Clark, and all the other young women, were greatly impressed by this cogent argument.

"I vow I'll never read another," said Miss Clark.

Madame Eva smiled and turned to Sue.

"I'm going now, dear," she said. "Come on to me when the girls have finished. The children will be clamouring for you, I expect."

Sue promised, and Madame Eva went out. She hailed a cab, and was driven to her flat in Bloomsbury.

On crossing the threshold she was surrounded by a crowd of excited children.

"O, mamma!" cried one grey-eyed boy. "Do come and look at Queenie, quick."

Madame Eva suffered herself to be led into the nursery, where a little girl, very oddly decked out, was sitting on a stool. From chin to heels she was swathed in a red table-cloth; in her hand she held a toasting-fork; on her head was a saucepan lid, to the handle of which a long plume of white paper had been fastened with string. At her right hand was a thimble on a reel of cotton; behind her a toy-ship floated in a dish of water; and in front, propped against a leg of the stool, was a large, new bun, from which one piece had been bitten.

"O, Queenie!" cried the boy. "You've been and eaten some of the bun and spoilt the look of it."

The little girl admitted her offence by a calm nod.

"What does it all mean?" asked Madame Eva.

Thereupon arose a wild, discordant outcry of shrill voices.

"O, hush, hush!" cried Madame Eva, stopping her ears with her fingers. "How can I understand what you say if you make so much noise? Now, King, tell me."

"Why," said the boy, somewhat impatiently, "I thought you would know. . . . Queenie, you dare!"

The little girl had reached down to the bun again. She brought her hand up sharply and chuckled.

"Queenie is the Penny Lady!" said King. "Don't you see?"

"O, yes, of course," cried Madame Eva. "Britannia, to be sure."

"Yes," said King.

"But what is the bun for?"

"By rights it ought to be a hot-cross one," said King, gravely; "but they aren't in now, Mary says. And even if they were I don't suppose we could get one half big enough. Why does the Penny Lady sit on a hot cross bun, mamma?"

"That is her foreign policy, my dear," replied Madame Eva, earnestly.

"Is it, really?" said the child, looking up. "Fancy!"

It was his habit to affect to understand all that was said to him.

"This is the lighthouse and the rock, of course," said Madame Eva, touching the thimble and reel of cotton.

"Yes," said King Coldershaw, "and at the back there is the sea and the ship on it."

"You are a very clever boy," said Madame Eva. "But won't you let poor Queenie eat the bun now?"

He looked up, wistfully, into his mother's face, and from his mother to Queenie.

"Very well," he said.

The little girl ate the bun.

"Give King some," said Madame Eva. "Dear Brother King who dressed you up so prettily."

"No," said Queenie. "I am going to eat it all myself."

"That is greedy."

"I like it," said the little girl.

Madame Eva was wise enough to forbear to press the point of morality. She turned to little King, who was standing apart, moodily regarding Queenie.

"Come, King," she said. "Don't frown like that at your sister because she is eating her bun. I daresay you had one too."

"Yes, I did," said King, nodding his head vigorously. "And so did Queenie. And now she's been and eaten both of them."

CHAPTER XXIX

It was a very merry party. For joy cometh in the morning of life; and here were untainted hearts and lusty lungs to give joy full expression. What frolickings there were! What screaming jests, lacking point or sting, and wild buffoonery! What quick unbendings of dignity on the part of Madame Eva and the buxom Sue!

At last, the tiny revellers were all dispersed to their homes in the care of their solicitous parents, King and Queenie lay flushing and crowing in their dreams, and Sue was gone away.

Madame Eva supped alone, having dismissed her servants to their rest.

The years had treated her kindly. She was more beautiful now than she had been in the promise of her youth. Her charms were ripened, and she seemed younger than her age. Her hair still shone as bravely and curled as wantonly as then; the brightness of her eyes was all undimmed. She had gained dignity and if the dainty bloom of young virginity was lost to her, there yet remained a gracious charm of sweet, perfected womanhood. She had prospered, too, and learned a little worldliness. She was content to accept the dicta of life which tell us that happiness is ever circumscribed, that sorrow is mortal and must die, and time a sure nepenthe. She had work wherewith to fill her days and her children for an everlasting solace. She was healthy, almost wealthy, and wise above the average; she was self-respecting and respected; her duties were her best pleasures; her tastes admitted easy satisfaction. Small wonder was it, then, that she cultivated cheerfulness of heart and deemed her lot a pleasant one. The ill-considered thoughts of her youth, her longings for the vague unattainable, were buried, and a headstone of philosophy was their sole memorial; she even suffered a few weeds of cynicism to trail over the grave of her dead

aspirations. "Their roots may bind the soil," she said (as if she feared an exhumation); "and they are not unlovely."

She smiled as she ate her meal of good things in her quiet, cosy room. She was reflecting that her noon of life was all the brighter for its troubled morning.

There came a soft knocking at the outer door. At first she discredited her senses; but the knocking continued. She rose, wondering what nocturnal visitor was this who came to see her. She concluded that it must be some urgent matter of business demanding her immediate attention—though this was an unlikely hypothesis—and went to the door and opened it.

There was a man standing on the threshold. He entered quickly, and snapped the latch behind him. He was dressed meagrely and shabbily; he wore no overcoat but was buttoned tight up to the chin. His hat was drawn forward over his eyes so that, the rays of light from the hall lamp falling on him almost vertically, Madame Eva could see no more of him than his moustache and red lips. She would have called out, but he put up a finger.

"S-sh!" he whispered.

She shrank back at the sound of his voice. He laughed and removed his hat. It was wet with rain and some drops of mud fell from it on the floor. He stood looking at her with his white teeth revealed. She met his gaze half fearfully, half defiantly. They did not speak for several minutes.

"Are you alone?" he asked, at last.

"Yes," she answered, hoarsely.

"What are you keeping me out here for, then? Can't you ask me to sit down somewhere, in the warm?"

"What do you want?"

"I'll talk to you in a minute," he replied; "when I've got a bit of life in me."

"Come in here," she said, and led him into the room where her supper was laid. He rubbed his hands at sight of the food and the bright fire.

"This is better," said he. "Give me something to eat and drink. Never mind, I'll help myself. But fetch me some brandy, if you have any."

"I haven't," she said.

"What have you got?"

"Claret?"

"Pshaw! I'll have beer. Come, you give your servants beer, I suppose."

She went away, and brought back two bottles of ale. He was eating greedily when she returned.

"You seem to have slipped into a soft thing," he said.

"You have been less fortunate, I suppose. Perhaps, we have got our deserts."

He looked up, scowling.

"None of that," he said, savagely.

She had preserved her calmless of demeanour hitherto, but now her anger was kindled. She turned away from him with a flushing face. He sat leering at her over his plate. The years had been less kind to him than to her. He was dirty, shabby, unkempt, redolent of the streets and poverty. His face was bloated; his eyes, bleared. He raised his glass to his mouth and his hand shook as if he had been palsied.

"Not so much of the cold shoulder," he said, presently, seeing that she still held her face averted.

"Eat your meat and drink your beer," she replied. "You can talk afterwards."

"I can talk when I like," he cried. "What do you mean?"

She confronted him.

"I mean," she said, "that I have not made up my mind about you yet. I want to think."

"Don't trouble," he said. "I've arranged everything."

He opened the second bottle of beer and heaped his plate anew. She watched him for a space, then turned away and gazed down into the fire.

At last, he was satisfied.

"Now, I can talk to you," he said. "But if you're going to show me your back, I won't."

"I can listen better like this," she said.

"But I would rather see your face."

She turned.

"That's better," he remarked. "And, by God! it's a face worth seeing."

"Never mind about my face," she said. "What do you want?"

"First of all," he replied, "I want a kiss."

She laughed.

"And I'll have it, too," he said, rising.

"If you don't sit down and keep seated," she said; "I'll scream till I bring the whole neighbourhood to me."

She spoke quite quietly and evenly. He sat down again.

"It isn't such a luxury as all that," he said. "And I can take a dozen another time. It would be a pity to disturb so many people for the sake of a kiss."

"It would," she agreed.

He stared at her.

"You're a very wonderful woman, my dear," he said. The tribute seemed wrung from him by the sight of her. She put his words aside with a scornful hand.

"How did you find me out?" she asked.

"I saw you in the street and followed you. I had been looking for you some time. There was a woman with you, so I didn't speak. I took a note of your address instead. I came up earlier this evening, but you seemed to have something on, and I went away. As you see, I'm not exactly Beau Brummel just now, and I thought I wouldn't upset you and your party by appearing before your guests in this very shabby attire . . . . No, don't thank me." He knew that she had no intention to do so, and spoke thus to annoy her. "So I waited till the party was over," he said.

"But why should you come here at all?" she asked. "What do you want?"

"I want some more beer," he said, grinning.

"You have had enough."

"I have never had enough. Fetch me another bottle."

"I will not," she said, angrily. "What will the servants think in the morning?"

He laughed outright.

"They will think you have acquired a wonderful appetite for food and beer," he said, "when they see the empty plates and bottles."

She was palpably distressed, and the sight of her distress emboldened him.

"Or they will think," he added, maliciously, "that you had a midnight visitor."

"They must have heard your voice."

"Then you are already compromised. How funny! And by your husband, too!" He was moved to loud

mirth. She waited until he was quiet again, then she spoke:

"You will go, now," she said.

He looked at her, affecting to be amused.

"No," he said. "I think not."

"I would rather you did not go of your own accord," she answered. "I want to save my reputation. I am going to have you turned out."

Her manner impressed him.

"What do you mean?" he asked.

"I will call one of the porters and send him for a policeman. I have only to touch this bell and he will come at once. The servants will be aroused and come out of their rooms to listen. I will say to the policeman: 'This man came to beg of me to-night. He seemed cold and hungry and unlike most beggars, so I asked him in and gave him food and drink. The servants being in bed I waited on him myself, because I was sorry for him, and he reminded me of someone I once knew. But he has repaid my kindness with insults; he has offered me violence. Lock him up.' And the policeman will take you away."

"I will tell him I am your husband."

"You will not be believed."

"Will you dare to say I am not?"

"I shall say nothing except: 'Take him away. Lock him up.'"

"It is too absurd. And, then, the lies you will have to tell!"

She winced.

"I shall tell no lies," she answered. "What I shall say to the policeman in the first instance will be literally, if not intrinsically, true. You did come to beg of me. You were cold and hungry and unlike most beggars. I certainly was not sorry for you. I must leave *that* out. But you do remind me of someone I once knew."

"I don't believe you dare do it."

She shrugged her shoulders.

"Very well," she said, "since you leave me no alternative——"

"Wait," he said, seeing that her hand was on the bell. "Wait. I'll go."

She smiled.

"I would rather you stayed to be turned out," she said.

His forehead was damp with the sweat of rage.

"At any rate," he said, "you might give me a sovereign or two."

She hesitated. "No," she said, at last. "I will not give you any money."

"You're damned hard on me."

"Come," she exclaimed, impatiently. "You must go now. I cannot wait any longer."

"You'll be sorry for this," he said, and cursed her and went out.

She shivered when he was gone and sat down and spread her hands to the blaze. Her face had grown white and almost old. The sound of his voice rang still in her ears. She looked around, and the room seemed larger for his absence. Presently, she stole away to bed.

In the morning she went to Mr. Henson Cleogh and told him what had passed on the previous evening. He listened, gravely, and when she was done speaking, said:

"In the first place, I should like to ask you a rather delicate question. You will not be offended?"

"No."

"Do you still entertain any feeling of affection for your husband?"

"None whatever."

"There is no lingering tenderness?"

"No."

"Forgive me if I am persistent. You regard your husband as you would regard the ordinary man in the street?"

"No, for I am indifferent to the ordinary man in the street."

"Ah!"

Eva smiled. "You misunderstand me, I see, Mr. Cleogh. I am not indifferent to my husband only because he inspires me with absolute repugnance. I can look at the ordinary man in the street and remain unmoved. I cannot look at my husband without feeling disgust. I despise and abhor him!"

Mr. Cleogh was shocked.

"I cannot believe that that is quite true," he said. "You are unjust to yourself."

"Does it sound so very dreadful, then?" asked Eva, sadly. "It is quite true."

"I ought to be glad," he said, "that you adopt this attitude of mind towards your husband, because it makes it so much easier for me to advise you; but I am sorry, all the same."

"Can't you find justification for me?"

"Not sufficient, not sufficient. I doubt if there be sufficient justification for such an extreme attitude."

"Yet, I daresay there are hundreds of wives who feel towards their husbands as I do."

"It may be so—I hope it isn't. But the fact does not excuse you."

"I am sorry you think so badly of me."

"I don't. I say you misjudge yourself, that's all."

Eva laughed peevishly. "You will forgive me if I remark that I think you are just the weeniest, teeniest, leetlest bit old-fashioned, Mr. Cleogh," she said.

"Old fashions have at least the dignity of age to recommend them."

"Age is oftener senile than dignified."

Mr. Cleogh frowned.

"I never argue with a lady," he said. "We will have done with these vague generalities and get back to the matter in hand."

"I am afraid," said Eva, "the contest has left us both rather sore."

"I beg your pardon if I have caused you any pain. I personally have no scars to boast," said Mr. Cleogh.

There was a pause.

"With regard to your husband?" Mr. Cleogh said, presently.

"I want to know how to meet him when he next molests me," said Eva. "I want to know how far the law is on my side."

"He may not trouble you again."

"You do not know him. I am making money; he is poor."

"He has no right to any of your money."

"It is absolutely my own?"

"Absolutely."

"He cannot buy things on the security of my belongings?"

"Of course not."

"Supposing he came to my house and took away a piece of furniture?"

"You could have him arrested for theft."

"As I could a common thief?"

"Exactly; but the magistrate would probably take into consideration his relationship to you. It is purely a matter of jurisdiction."

"If he assaulted me?"

"Do you mean 'beat' you?"

"N-no. He would not do that. He would be afraid. If he touched me?"

"Eh?"

"Embraced me, kissed me?"

Mr. Cleogh pursed his lips.

"The non-molestation clause in your separation deed provides for that. He has no right to—er—embrace or kiss you."

"He cannot enter my house and refuse to leave it?"

"No."

"I could have him turned out by the police?"

"My dear Mrs. Coldershaw!"

"Madame Eva, please. Could I have him turned out?"

"Ye-es, you could."

"And the law would uphold me?"

"O, yes."

"I am very glad to hear it. Now I shall know what to do."

"May I offer you a word of advice, Madame Eva? I am an old man. I have had a large experience of life. Lawyers usually have. And I know the world."

Mr. Cleogh spoke thus, standing before his fire.

"Yes," said Eva.

"You will do well to consider before you decide on any strong line of action in the matter of yourself and your husband. I have given you the law on the subject. You may rely on its being correct. But," and he shook a finger at her, "but no man can tell the issue of any case at law. It is likely you would prevail against your husband, if you invoked the aid of the law against him—extremely likely; but it is possible that you might not. The law is not a hide-bound thing; it takes some account of equity; and it leaves great power in the hands of its administrators. To suggest a case in point: I have told

you that if your husband took a piece of furniture out of your house you could have him arrested as a common thief. So you could, and—legally considered—he would be a thief. But it is very likely that if he were brought before a magistrate and you appeared to prosecute him, the bench would laugh at you—the press assuredly would—and pooh-pooh you, and dismiss the charge as one beneath its serious consideration."

"I would tell the magistrate the true facts of the case from the beginning. He should learn of my husband's cruelty and unfaithfulness——"

"I don't believe he would listen to you. Your case would probably be one of many, and he would naturally desire to dispose of it out of hand. He might say: 'This is not a proper place for the settlement of matrimonial squabbles. Go away, both of you, and arrange it all amicably. Or, if you have any very great cause of complaint against your husband, sue him in the Divorce Court.'"

Eva broke in on Mr. Cleogh's discourse with a passionate outcry.

"Do you mean to tell me," she cried, "that any man has the power to set aside the law like that, to—to pooh-pooh me?"

"The magistrate would confound yours with the hundred and one matrimonial squabbles that he is for ever asked to waste his time over. Even if he did not, he could only pass a very light sentence on your husband, and then the whole thing would happen all over again very likely. I don't think he would sentence your husband; he would at most dismiss him with a caution."

"It is very wrong and wicked," said Eva.

"I am trying to give you the probabilities," said Mr. Cleogh, "because I want to save you from exposure and ridicule. But the law is as I have stated, and I have no doubt, if you spent a great deal of money and time and health, you could uphold your right to be let alone. It is for you to decide, entirely. I have given you my advice, and I am prepared, also, to help you in any way."

"I am assured of that," said Eva; "and it is very good of you."

"I merely say, Don't be rash, and don't let your indignation against your husband—your righteous indignation—overweigh your sense of what is meet and fitting."

There was much more said Ways and means of circumvention were devised. Eva left the office sadly, in a mood to rail bitterly against the British Constitution.

CHAPTER XXX

It was inevitable that a child named Edward King Coldershaw should be called "King" by his mother; and, as a natural corollary, that his sister should be dubbed "Queenie," though Amy was the name bestowed on her at christening. Mothers are prone to small conceits of this nature; nothing is so fatal to the sense of humour as maternity—except paternity.

Little King Coldershaw was a handsome, healthy child, and a profound philosopher; but, then, philosophy is a birthday present that we all contrive to lose. He was five years old, and he knew that this was a great age to attain to. He had rubbed the bloom off the world already, and was studying the rind of things. He enjoyed the simple parts of life intensely, and he realised that the mysteries did not matter; they either explained themselves or were explained for him. He threw out questions sometimes (as a man stretches a leg) for the pleasure of feeling existence or to promote conversation. He was not greatly interested in what interested his elders. He deemed their habits unusual and perverse. He loved his mother very dearly, but he loved better to suck a jammy thumb. He was very polite to Queenie, however, and it usually happened that when a morsel of joy fell to them he cracked the shell of the nut that she might munch the kernel. Queenie was entirely a creature of moods and impulses. She did right and wrong by accident. She had no moral perceptions or sense of proportion. She thought that it was very nice of King to be kind to her—and very inferior; she would have scorned to be kind to him. Sometimes, she beat him cruelly. He always took these thrashings like a gentleman, and never cried before his sister. But once his mother found him under the sheets of his little bed, weeping bitterly, with two livid weals across his face.

"Who did it?" she asked him.

"Nobody," he answered.

"Did Queenie do it?"

"No, mamma, I did it myself."

She looked at him. He hung his head, fingering the buttons on her bodice. She could see that his face was dyed crimson.

Usually, however, the children played together in perfect amity.

Eva loved to be with them, to gather them about her knees and talk with them, to join in their play, to be their court of appeal in matters of dispute. She was never tired of watching their quick development, and was especially glad when they asked questions. In answering, she always had due regard to their easy susceptibility to boredom, and was careful not to tire them with matters beyond their small comprehension.

It was her habit, during the winter months, to amuse the children by telling tales to them. She found great pleasure in this exercise of her imagination; for, though she did not scruple to lay any author under contribution, the tales she told were in the main original. She drew her characters from every source. Ulysses and Sindbad met on the Island of Æolus, and it was Robinson Crusoe, not Hercules, who shot the eagle and set Prometheus free; the Pied Piper of Hamelin proved to be none other than Orpheus, whilst the scene of the contest between Atalanta and Hippomenes was the Crystal Palace, which the children had visited many times and knew quite well. Sometimes, these incongruities overpowered Eva, and she laughed heartily; then, King and Queenie would laugh, too, so that the room echoed with the sounds of mirth.

One dim afternoon, the two children were sitting before the fire in the dining-room, when there came a knock at the outer door.

"That is mamma, I expect," said King, rising. Queenie remained seated. He went out into the hall.

The servant was talking to a tall, dark man, dressed in a long, heavy overcoat.

"Then I'll wait till she comes in," he was saying.

He strode past her toward the dining-room, and encountered King. He stooped and gazed into the child's face.

"Hullo!" he said.

"Hullo!" answered King.

"And what is your name, eh?"

"King Coldershaw."

The stranger laughed.

"Shake hands," he said, with loud boisterousness.

The child put his little, pink fist in the man's gloved palm.

"That's right. Now we're friends. How old are you?"

"Five. Queenie is only four."

"Who is Queenie?"

"Queenie's the baby."

"Is this Queenie?"

"Yes," said King, looking round and seeing his sister just behind him. "This is Queenie." He added, in a whisper: "She is only a girl, you know."

The stranger laughed again.

"Give me a kiss, Queenie," he said, holding out his hands to her. But she turned and ran away. He ran after her into the dining-room, and King followed.

The little girl was standing in a corner, with a finger in her mouth.

"Go away," she cried. "I don't like you."

"You don't know who I am," said the stranger.

"I don't like you," reiterated the little girl. "I am frightened of you."

"You are so big, you see," said King, deprecatingly.

The stranger approached Queenie, who screamed. A servant came running into the room.

"Please don't frighten her, sir," she said. "She is a very timid, excitable child."

"Hold your tongue!" was the sharp reply. "I am her father!"

The girl stared, mumbled an apology, and withdrew.

"Now, Queenie," said John Coldershaw; "will you come to me?"

"No," she said; "I am frightened."

He scowled, and went toward her and lifted her in his arms.

"King, King!" she cried, shrilly.

"Don't hurt her, please," said King. "She's only four."

Queenie continued to scream loudly. She beat her father's face with her clenched hands and kicked him

vigorously. He grew angry, but would not release her. She was quite exhausted with ineffectual struggling when the door opened suddenly and Eva entered the room. She had heard the cries of her child from without, and came in, breathless and pallid.

"Who—what is it?" she exclaimed.

John Coldershaw set down the child. He set her down roughly and carelessly, so that she lost her balance and fell on her face. Eva uttered a hoarse cry and ran to Queenie and picked her up.

"My little one!" she murmured, straining the child to her bosom and kissing her. King stole to his mother's side and pressed his cheek against her dress, looking wrathfully at his father.

"Come," said John Coldershaw, "send the squalling brat away, for God's sake. It's enough to deafen one!"

She turned on him fiercely.

"How dare you come here, frightening my children!" she cried.

"*Our* children!" he said, softly. "Ours, my dear."

She uttered no rejoinder, but sat down, that she might the better take King into her embrace also. She engirdled them both with her arms.

"I suppose you have used me as a sort of bogey to frighten the children with?" said John Coldershaw. "'If you're not good I will send for your wicked father, and he will come and eat you up.' That sort of thing, eh?"

He spoke bitterly.

"No," she said; "I have never mentioned you to them."

"They are like me," he said; "the girl especially."

It was true, but Eva answered, angrily:

"They are not like you."

He was silent for a short while. Queenie turned her head and looked at him. King had not shifted his gaze once.

"Come, now," said John Coldershaw, "which of you would like a penny to buy cakes and sweets and toys with?"

"I would," cried Queenie, eagerly. She stretched out her hands and wriggled desperately to escape from her mother's embrace.

"But wouldn't you rather stay with me, Queenie?" Eva exclaimed.

"No," answered the little girl, "I want to go to the gemman."

The mother felt sick with sudden pain. Her lip quivered. She turned to King.

"You don't want to go to the gentleman, do you, King?" she said, kissing him.

"Yes, I do," he replied.

She was filled with jealous rage.

"Go, then," she cried, and released them from her arms.

They ran at once to their father's knee. King, as was his wont, gave his sister precedence, but very reluctantly.

"You must give me a kiss first," said John Coldershaw to Queenie.

She held up her flower-like face and pursed her lips, readily enough. He kissed her and pressed the penny into her hand.

"I do love you very much," she said.

"Do you love me better than you love mamma?"

"Yes," answered Queenie; "I do love you twice as better."

Eva laughed harshly. John smiled.

"I suppose you want a penny too, don't you?" he asked, addressing King.

The child nodded.

"No," cried Queenie, "don't give him one." And she pushed her brother away. She tried to climb up on to her father's knee. He put his hands under her arms and lifted her.

"Ride me to Banbury Cross," she said, "like Mr. Cleogh does."

But he did not understand.

"I will give you another penny instead," he said. And she crooned joyously and clapped her hands.

"I do love you ever so very much," she said. "I do love you twice as better as Mr. Cleogh, and twice as better as Sue, and twice as better as King, and twice as better——"

Eva rose, hastily.

"Put my child down," she cried.

"*Ours*, my dear, *ours*," he said, leering spitefully. "Certainly more mine than yours, by the look of things. Come, Queenie, whose little girl are you—mamma's or mine?"

"I am your little girl," she replied; "because you do give me pennies."

"O, Queenie, Queenie!" murmured Eva.

King had stood apart. He now turned and looked up into his mother's face. She would not invite him by word or gesture to approach her; she stared at him with mournful eyes, proudly, but wistfully. He suddenly burst into tears and ran towards her, crying out:

"*I* love you, mamma. *I* love you very much."

She caught him to her bosom, sobbing, and went out, quickly, from the room. The lock clicked loudly, and the sound of her retreating footsteps followed. Then there was silence.

Queenie sat upon her father's knee, the penny clutched in her hand. There was an expression of vague trouble on her face. John Coldershaw watched her, doubtfully; he was cold after his glowing period of mocking triumph. Presently Queenie said, softly:

"I want to go to my mamma."

"Won't you stay with me?" he asked. And he put his arm about her and drew her to him.

"No," she said, struggling. "I want to go to my mamma." He held her more firmly. "Let me go," she cried, and burst into tears.

He relaxed his hold and she ran to the door, calling out, "Mamma, mamma! I do love you, I do."

She reached up, turned the handle, and toddled away, her voice ringing shrilly through the corridors.

John Coldershaw stood before the fire, rolling his hands and frowning.

His appearance had undergone an improvement. His person was unchanged, but his raiment was new and glossy. The truth was that he had lately made a few small *coups* on the turf. He drew out a cigar and lighted it; he set a match to the gas and routed up the fire; then he doffed his overcoat and settled down in an armchair.

He was sleeping when Eva returned to the room, with his head thrown back and his legs sprawled over the hearthrug. She drew close to him, stepping softly, and bent her head and peered into his face. The light was full upon it. . . . . There were white hairs in his black crop. The flesh was sunken between his jaws and swollen on his cheeks; his nostrils were inflamed; his lips sagged loosely

and were purple in colour; his skin was rough and uneven and loose; thin crimson veins traversed the dull redness of his complexion. Eva glanced from his face to the reflection of her own in the mirror over the mantel, and smiled. Then she turned again to contemplation of her husband.

He opened his eyes and met her gaze sleepily. For a few seconds he lay supine, watching her. Then he bestirred himself and sat up and yawned. There was a little pause. He drooped his head and looked into the fire. Still she did not speak. Her silence embarrassed him. He felt the discomfiture of a man surprised in sleep; his wits were gone astray; he was had at a disadvantage. He was impelled to look up presently and meet the eyes of Eva.

"Why don't you speak?" he growled.

"Why should I?" she asked. "I have only to ring the bell."

He stirred uneasily in the depths of the chair.

"You might give me a chance," he said, gloomily. "I only want to talk to you for a few minutes."

She hesitated.

"What do you want to say?" she asked, at length.

"I want to make a proposal to you," he said.

"Yes?"

He rose and paced the room.

"It's like this," he said. "I'm just about sick of the way I'm going on. I want to turn over a new leaf, to start fresh. I want to get out of England. I want to go to America or Australia or somewhere. I'm not particular. Any place where English is spoken will suit me."

"Go on," she said, seeing that he paused.

"But I can't get out of it," he said; "because I haven't got any money. That's the long and the short of it."

"How does this concern me?" she asked.

"I think it does concern you," he replied. "You want to get rid of me. Oh, I know that. Well, here's a chance to do it. Give me enough money to pay my passage to New York, with a small margin over to live for a week or so when I get there, and I'll promise not to molest you any more."

"Is your promise worth the money?" she asked.

He winced.

"I know you've got good reason to distrust me," he said. "I can't but own that. And it's all against me, of

course. Still, I'm genuine this time. I really do want to go away. My health is bad. A sea voyage and change of climate would do me no end of good, the doctor says."

She looked at him with her eyelids narrowed.

"Why should I give you money?" she said. "You can do me no harm. I have the whiphand of you. The law is all on my side."

"I don't want to do you harm," he said. "It's for your sake, as well as my own, that I want to go away. So long as I'm in England I shall always be trying to get money out of you, whenever I'm hard up. I *can't* do without money. I must have it. But if I were two or three thousand miles away you would be out of my reach, and I should have to work or starve. That's what I want. I want an incentive to work. I'm sick of idling about. But, all the same, I never shall do any work while I'm in London and there's a possibility of getting something out of you. Oh, I know how it is with me!"

She felt that his view of himself was true.

"I cannot trust you," she said. "You might come back. You might never even start."

"Well," he said, slowly. "I can't promise not to come back; but I can promise to start."

She was surprised, and a little won, by this evidence of his sincerity.

"No," she said again. "I cannot trust you."

"I will swear on the Bible, if you like," he said. "Or I will sign something. Come, it's worth your while. Try it as an experiment. It won't cost you much."

"How much?" she asked.

"Fifty pounds would do," he said.

She was torn with doubt. She could not deny that expediency was on the side of her acceding to his terms. And she was so consumed with loathing and dread of him. Moreover, she believed him to be sincere in his expressed desire to go abroad.

"I will give you twenty-five pounds now," she said; "and another twenty-five when you are in New York."

This would ensure his going, she thought.

"All right," he said. "That's all I want."

He would have thanked her, but she checked him, saying:

"I am giving you this money for my own sake, not yours."

She wrote a cheque and gave it to him. He put it in his pocket and departed.

On the threshold he offered her his hand, shamefacedly; but she would not be betrayed into any manifestation of softness. He went out, smiling wryly.

CHAPTER XXXI

Eva returned to her fireside. She had scarcely settled herself in a chair when there came a gentle tapping at the outer door.

"Why should he come back?" she thought, frowning, and half started from her seat.

The servant announced: "Miss Kilmorie."

Eva uttered a glad cry.

"I hear you, you delicate flatterer!" exclaimed a voice from without, and the visitor entered.

She was little and lithe; her hair was grey, but her face was young and bright, though pale. Under her arm she carried a violin-case, which she deposited carefully on the sofa.

"Now for a concession to the flesh!" she said, and drew Eva forward by the hands and kissed her. They sat down. Miss Kilmorie removed her bonnet and flung it aside carelessly.

"Do you know what to-day is?" she asked, suddenly.

"No."

"Fie! How could you forget? It's the second birthday of our friendship. The tender thing is just two years old."

"I didn't think," said Eva, "when you first came to me for a gown that we were going to be good friends."

"I have such crude shoulders!"

"It wasn't that."

They laughed, and then were grave.

"We should all be gods or prophets if life were not so improbable," said Miss Kilmorie. "It's a merciful dispensation that provides the unforeseen to upset plans and riddle calculations. Just fancy how it would be if kings governed the earth!"

Eva smiled.

"May I play something?" asked Miss Kilmorie, taking

up her violin-case and unlocking it. "Or is it too late?"

"There is no time for music—except all time."

Miss Kilmorie laughed. She took the violin and started to tune it. She put it aside after a few moments.

"No," she said. "The fiddle will not sing. The Disturbing Element has been here."

"How do you know?"

She wrinkled her dainty nose.

"There's a smell of cigar-smoke," she said. "O, Eva, Eva!"

Eva blushed.

"S-sh!" she said. "It was my husband."

Miss Kilmorie's eyebrows rose.

"Then he isn't dead?" she cried.

"No."

"How dreadful!"

"I don't think you ought to say that."

"Don't you feel so, too."

"I . . . . No."

"You used to say you wished he were dead."

"I never did. It was you."

"O, Eva, Eva! O, blessed truth! What does he want?"

"He came to see me."

"What was his ulterior object?"

Eva faltered. "It is odd," she said, "that the one unpleasant person among my acquaintances should be my only friend."

"Not at all, my dear."

"He was very humble and meek."

"Hard up, eh?"

"I won't talk to you any more."

Miss Kilmorie rose from her chair and sat down at Eva's feet, catching at her hands and fondling them.

"Don't say that," she said. "I can't help being nasty. I hate men so—poor things!"

Eva sloughed her armour of dignity at once. She loved this acid little woman, who pretended to be hard because she was so soft—as pretty, harmless snakes make a display of venom. Their friendship had begun prosaically enough, but it was very real and strong now—the beautiful flower of a slow-growing evergreen, watered with sympathetic tears.

"I'll tell you about it," said Eva.

Miss Kilmorie listened. At the end she said:

"I don't understand it. But I will not judge you. 'Judge not, lest ye be judged,' is a text peculiarly applicable to women. I can be sorry for you, though."

"I am glad that we should part kindly."

"He will come back."

"I hope not. I don't think he will."

"But he promised to go abroad!" said Miss Kilmorie. "How can he stay away after such a promise?"

"You are too bad."

"How I hate men, Eva! That means, how well I know them!"

"One man is not all men. You must not think that because one was bad all are bad. There is your brother. He is a good man, isn't he? You might as well argue from him that all men are good."

"My brother is the golden exception."

"If you inquired, I daresay you would find—on the authority of everybody—that everybody is an exception to every rule."

"I think I had better play my fiddle," said Miss Kilmorie, returning to her seat and taking up her violin again.

Eva turned down the lights. The fire ticked crisply. A red glare danced through the room. Miss Kilmorie played.

The pain of the world found expression. Its voice was weak and tired, but wonderfully sweet. It sang many songs. It sang of the Hill of Desolation that was once a volcano, but is now grey and cold as the face of women who fall asleep weeping. It sang of the Valley of the Shadow of Death, where no light is. It sang of mountains, black and red, against a golden sky, where the Thunder of the Wrath of God rolls everlastingly, and cruel claws of lightning play, cat-like, with doomed souls. It sang of grey wastes, marshy with tears, reflecting a grey heaven in every pool, where the trees are withered and the flowers are burnt to ashes, and the grass is black—where, in the silver dawn, weary women wander blindly, with empty breasts and seared hearts, and can find no rest. It sang of the illimitable Wilderness of Sin, red and rotten with shame, where the cruel sun blazes on the sweltering soil and lean-limbed Sorrow sits for ever among the parched

passion-flowers. It sang of darknesses that never lift; of eyes that are always wet; of eternal ills and unending quests, of sorrow and sickness and vainlonging . . . .

The music stopped.

"No, no," cried Eva.

Miss Kilmorie laughed oddly and affected to yawn. "Don't turn up the lights," she said. But the glow of the fire had discovered the bright burden of her eyes already. "You can only see illusions in the dark."

Eva did not answer her, but lay supine, heavily brooding.

"I have been shamelessly happy during these four years of my traffic with vulgar fashion," she said, suddenly. "One wonders, every now and then, how it is possible to be happy in a world like this."

"It is too painfully possible," said Miss Kilmorie. "Enough money to afford a favorite dish just too seldom —a good bed—a friend—some cushions—a few rags of self-respect—a short memory—and—there you are! The only happiness is in material things. We may cant as we will. Fame—love—power—and the rest, what are they? Only a rind on the apple of happiness—the prettiest part of the fruit, the most tasteless, and the least nutritious. Eh? What? The price of happiness is shame; but if you pay the price you don't get the perfect article. It must be filched to be enjoyed fully, for it always belongs to someone else. There isn't enough to go round."

"O, stop, stop!" cried Eva. "I don't want to hear truth to-night. Tell me about that wonderful figment, your brother. When am I to see him?"

"Are you ripe, do you think?"

Eva shrugged her shoulders.

"He is *your* brother," she said, dryly.

"He is in London now, staying with me. Shall I bring him to-morrow?"

"Bring him, yes. And in the evening I will dig a grave for an illusion."

CHAPTER XXXII

It was the morrow. Miss Kilmorie had brought her brother to Eva. His name was Horace. He was big and blond; in speech and manner, typically English. They were in the dining-room, conversing after dinner. Horace Kilmorie was smoking a postprandial cigar, and talking between the whiffs. He had travelled in many remote countries and had an inexhaustible store of anecdote to detail. The women listened to him in silence, for the most part, only interjecting occasional questions or exclamations of surprise. Eva sat near the fire, her face cushioned on her hand. Miss Kilmorie crouched on a stool at her feet.

"Is he not wonderful?" she whispered.

Her brother caught the whisper and divined something of its import.

"I am afraid," he said, smiling, "my sister gave you quite a wrong idea of me. You expected me to be like her—clever and all that. Now you know better. She has the brains. I have only the muscles. But as I prefer muscles to brains, I don't grumble. She does."

"I wanted both," explained Miss Kilmorie, "and beauty, besides."

"I have seen too many wonderful things," he said, "to concern myself overmuch with such tawdry trimmings of life as you enjoy who live in dirty little towns."

"Mark his large contempt!" cried Miss Kilmorie. "And he dares to call London a dirty little town!"

"I don't like London," he confessed. "It strangles me. It takes me by the throat. And if you had spent a night in a *kartel* out on the sandy *karroo*, you wouldn't like it either."

"That must be a great experience," said Eva. "But what is a 'kartel?' I can guess at 'karroo.'"

"A *kartel* is a little wooden bed that you fix up in a waggon. They use 'em in South Africa. It's a Boer

word, I believe. I have slept in one often. I haven't slept in one, still oftener. I have lain awake watching the moon under the tilt, and listening to the thousand voices of that teeming darkness, night on night, and never grown tired. To slip off the tail-board and stand under a perfect unbroken hemisphere of sky, with the stars, thick as dust, over you, breeds big thoughts, and you go back to your *kartel* with no desire for sleep. You lie thinking as no *predikant* could make you think. You see beyond the blue and your heart quivers in you as it used to when you were a child and your mother talked religion to you."

"I have always maintained," said Miss Kilmorie, "that heaven was discovered when mankind first got off his four legs and walked upright and saw the sky."

"It is likely," assented Horace. "But I am afraid I bore you, Madame Eva?"

"No, no," she cried. "I love to hear of these great, virginal lands."

"I am going back to South Africa in a week or two," he said. "And right glad am I, too. I am trying to persuade Cicely, here, to come with me."

"O, you won't be so cruel!" Eva exclaimed. "How am I to get on without her?"

"How am *I* to get on?" he said. "I want her, too."

"You can stay here."

"No, I can't. My art won't flourish under a drab sky. I love space—room."

"Are you an artist?"

"A painter."

"You should see Madame Eva's children, Horace," said his sister.

He lifted his head sharply.

"I didn't know," he said, and stopped. He added, "But I'm no good at heads."

They stayed a little longer, chatting, and then departed.

"That is a MAN!" said Eva, when they were gone.

She remembered him pleasantly as she worked among her women on the ensuing day.

It was late in the afternoon ere her "show-room" was empty.

"Heigho!" she cried, stretching herself in a chair, as the door closed behind the last pretty dawdler. "How tired I am! Verily, all is vanity! Ring down the curtain,

Sue, and put out the lights. Another day's mumming is over. Now for tea."

"You ought to have had it two hours ago—when the girls had theirs," grumbled Sue. "You'll knock yourself up—going on like this."

"Nonsense!" said Eva. "I like hard work. And I am strong. It does me good."

Sue snorted.

"Miss Kilmorie is waiting for you in your room," she said, presently, as she moved about, packing away silks and satins in great, green boxes.

"That means a 'gad,' Sue, as you say."

"I thought as much. She told me not to disturb you at your work. She's been waiting an hour."

Eva went in to her friend.

"Well," said Miss Kilmorie, "is that grave ready?"

"Which grave?"

"It isn't, I see. You look tired."

"I have been chasing butterflies."

"Here's your tea. I made it. The fourth cup in an hour. I was determined you should have it fresh."

"You'll ruin me. But it's rather nice of you."

Eva sipped her tea.

"My brother wants you to come and dine with us to-night. Are you impressed?"

"Not particularly."

"He is. What do you think of him?"

"He wasn't all figment."

"We must dissemble, I see."

"I like him."

"Come, that's something."

"He is so big and strong."

"Like a great river with a clean bed—simple, straight, transparent. We are at the 'Occidental.' I suppose you haven't a gown here?"

"No; I must go home, first."

"Come along, then. We mustn't be late. He has the healthiest appetite for food. That's semi-starvation abroad, I suppose."

They went downstairs together. It was a clear, cold night.

"Let us walk," said Miss Kilmorie.

The frozen ground rang like iron under their tread. The

roads were white. Above, where the amber glow of the gas melted into the serene blue, a great moon sailed majestically. Eva remarked upon its beauty.

"It looks like a spot of soap in a sea of starch," said Miss Kilmorie, laughing wickedly. "It is like nothing else, my dear."

There were bad news awaiting Eva at home. She was told that King was ill. At the tidings Miss Kilmorie's mood of archness was changed to one of eager sympathy. She went in to the child, with Eva.

He lay in his bed, asleep. His face was deeply flushed; he breathed heavily; his curls lay damp on his forehead.

Eva sent at once for a doctor.

"You must make my excuses to your brother," she said to Miss Kilmorie, removing her bonnet and cloak and settling herself in a chair at the bedside of her sick child. "I can't go out to-night."

"Let me stay here with you," said Miss Kilmorie. "The servant can take a telegram."

Eva thanked her with a glance.

A little white figure rose from a cot at the further end of the room.

"Mamma," cried a small wistful voice.

Eva turned.

"Lie down, Queenie," she said. "Go to sleep."

The little white figure subsided. Presently, it rose again, and the small, wistful voice asked:

"Is King ill, mamma?"

Eva answered: "Yes, my dear. You must be very quiet."

Queenie lay down again. Miss Kilmorie went to her and kissed her. The little girl suffered the caress, but did not make response to it.

"Do you love me, little one?" asked Miss Kilmorie, awkwardly. She was not used to children.

"No," said Queenie, calmly, and rolled over and turned away her face.

Miss Kilmorie flushed painfully and stood watching the child with mournful eyes. Then she moved away and joined Eva.

King was moaning in his sleep. Suddenly, he started to talk. His voice was parched and husky. He babbled of the heroes of mythology whose names his mother's stories had made familiar to him.

"Hush! hush!" whispered Eva, putting her hand upon his forehead.

He opened his eyes and smiled up at her.

"And old Polyphemus went down to the shore as angry as angry could be, tumbling over the rocks because he was blind and couldn't see Ulysses, though he could hear him talking and laughing in the ship," King shouted.

"Hush, hush," Eva whispered again.

He became silent.

"Mamma," wailed the small, wistful voice from the further end of the room, and the little white figure rose once more.

"Lie down, Queenie," said Eva. "You mustn't talk. You must go to sleep."

"I'm ill, too, Mamma."

Eva smiled.

"Go to sleep," she said. "And you will be all right. . . . . It's an illness of the mind," she said to Miss Kilmorie. "Jealousy, that's all."

Queenie whimpered petulantly.

"I don't want to go to sleep," she said. "I want you to come and sit over here, Mamma."

Eva bent over King. Queenie shook her shoulders and screwed her pink fist in her eye. But she could find no tears wherewith to move her mother to softness. She gasped and forced a few weak, distressful howls; then, growing tired, lay down, in sudden, sullen quiet, and fell asleep—almost on the instant.

King had fallen asleep, also.

The stillness of death was in the room. There were a dozen minor noises without—the faint rattle of tin-pans in the kitchen; a distant piano; the far-down murmur of the street; the barking of a dog—but these noises served only to accentuate the stillness.

Miss Kilmorie sat over against the fire.

"Talk to me," said Eva, hoarsely. "I can't bear this silence. Do you think he is really ill?"

"I—— No."

There was a long pause. Then came the doctor's brisk rat-tat at the door, startling the women from their torpor and the children from their sleep. King began again to rave deliriously. He had been sleeping calmly.

The doctor entered. Eva went to meet him at the door.

As he bent over the bed she watched his face. Miss Kilmorie did not stir.

"Only a cold," said the doctor. "I'll send round a bottle of something. Keep him warm and snug. He'll be all right in the morning."

"There is no fear——"

"O, no. He's all right. How are you, by the way?"

"I don't matter," said Eva.

"You mustn't worry about him. Have you had your dinner?"

"Eh? No."

"Well, have some at once. You need it."

"But——"

"The nursemaid can watch, if you're anxious. How's the little girl?"

"Jealous of her brother's illness."

"Ha! Well, well. Good-by. Don't worry."

And he departed.

"I breathe—I live again," said Eva.

"You must be very happy," said Miss Kilmorie. "I am sick with envying you."

She spoke in a slow, harsh voice.

"You want your dinner," Eva said, lightly.

Miss Kilmorie laughed.

"Is that all?" she said. "I thought it was something else."

They went in to dinner.

In the morning King was perceptibly better; by midday, he was almost well. Eva did not leave him till the evening. Then, Miss Kilmorie called. Learning the glad news, she said:

"My brother insists that you must dine with us to-night. Professor Pack will be there to bait the hook. My brother and he were at Charterhouse together. Do come."

"Are you sure about the Professor?"

"Eva, how can you be so offensive!"

Eva laughed.

"I'll come," she said.

"You're simply dying to, really," said Miss Kilmorie.

"I haven't denied it. But I'm not."

"O, come along."

On the way, Miss Kilmorie said:

"Eva, I hate that little girl of yours. She bit me yesterday."

"Bit you!"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"On the heart,"

Eva did not reply.

"She was like a sneer at me," said Miss Kilmorie. "I asked her if she loved me, and she said 'No'—quite calmly."

"Cecily!"

"I'm a fool, of course. But it made me think of the man who . . . . no woman likes to think of the man who. I should be a true woman but for him."

"You are a true woman."

"I won't be pacified like a whining baby. Eva, you—you——" She stopped. The cab rattled on over the stones. Eva took her hand and pressed it, timidly.

They stopped at the Occidental Hotel.

Horace Kilmorie and Professor Pack were awaiting them in the great hall. The Professor was a withered young man, loose-jointed, shock-headed, with mild, short-sighted eyes and a dust-coloured beard.

They turned aside into a large, dim room, pending dinner.

"So glad you've come," said Horace Kilmorie to Eva. "How is your little boy?"

"He is better—almost well. It was nothing at all, really."

But Kilmorie was not listening. Eva drooped nervously under his gaze. Suddenly, she raised her head and looked into his face. He met her gaze steadily for a moment, then averted his eyes, and, turning, addressed the Professor.

"Your brother is scolding me fearfully," Eva said to Cecily. "Do come over and help me to withstand him."

"I can't be interrupted," replied Miss Kilmorie, laughing oddly.

The bell rang for dinner.

They dined *table d'hôte;* at a small table near a window. They could see the busy street, flooded with light, and hear its million voices, blent in one harmonious hum. The dinner was good. Eva addressed herself to Professor Pack.

"You were at school with Mr. Kilmorie, weren't you?" she said.

He dropped a large, white lozenge into his champagne.

"Yes," he said. "He believed in me, then."

"I believe in you now, you know, old chap," interposed Kilmorie.

"And you don't read my books."

"I buy 'em, though."

"*I* read your books, Mr. Pack," said Cecily.

"Did you notice if I put a lozenge into my champagne or not?" he asked her, disregarding the remark.

"Yes," she replied, good-humouredly. "You did."

He thanked her. "I always forget," he said. "And it wouldn't do to put two in."

Horace Kilmorie was eating and drinking and talking heartily. He sat confronting the Professor, to whom he addressed most of his conversation. Eva remarked, with amusement, that each man held the other in affectionate contempt. She had come resolved to cultivate the great savant sedulously, for she was something of a hero-worshipper; but it piqued her to find, as the meal progressed, that all her sympathies were with Kilmorie. He was so big and strong and handsome; in all that he did and said there was conviction and strength. The Professor was not a man; he was a head, and that an ugly one. His voice was feeble and broken; his movements were ungainly and random. He did everything slowly and dully. Once the two men stretched for a dish simultaneously and their two right hands rested in juxtaposition. Eva marked the contrast. Kilmorie had a hand for a sword or a helm, a big, brown hand, firm and deft; the Professor had the hand of a monkey, long, thin, grey and angular. The difference between the two hands was the difference between the two men.

Ere the meal was ended, Eva was thinking that even in the matter of mental equipment Kilmorie was superior to the Professor. Though not so abstrusely learned, he was wiser in a knowledge of mankind; he had wit and fancy too, and could express himself. Moreover, he saw the world with the eyes of an artist and a man of humour. His bias was toward large effects; he had the broad, colour-loving mind of a Rembrandt. His spirit was the fit tenant of his body.

Eva stayed a great while after dinner, listening whilst Kilmorie talked, though she had determined to leave early,

excusing herself on the ground of her anxiety for her child. She was sorry to depart.

Kilmorie accompanied her downstairs to the hall of the hotel. He had lapsed into a mood of silence. Eva, looking up at his face, saw that his eyes were bent on her. She was put to sudden confusion and could say nothing.

The porter whistled for a cab. There was some delay. They stood on the broad stone step, side by side, under the white light.

"You are cold," he said.

"No," she answered.

"I felt you shiver," he insisted. "Is that all the wrap you have?"

"It is quite warm, really."

"It isn't half thick enough. Women are very careless of their health, I think."

Eva laughed. As she laughed, a man, passing in the street, looked at her. The light touched his face. He raised his hat and went on.

"Let us go inside," said Eva. "It is rather cold, after all."

She shivered again. Kilmorie looked at her keenly, but said no word until they were back in the hall again.

"Who was that man?" he asked, then, speaking very brusquely.

She affected surprise.

"A friend," she said. "Do you know him?"

"No; but he isn't a nice man."

She tried to feel resentful of his rudeness.

"How do you know that?" she asked.

He smiled. "Oh, I know it," he said, carelessly. "It's in his face."

The cab rattled up to the door.

"Fetch me my hat," said Kilmorie to a page.

"I hope you won't trouble to come home with me," said Eva.

"Yes, I am coming," he answered.

"I would rather you did not."

"I *want* to come."

"You are very kind."

"But I *want* to come."

She subsided. The page handed him his hat and coat.

"Your sister and the Professor?" Eva ventured. "How about them?"

"Oh, I don't know," he said; "but I expect they'll be able to bore one another without our assistance."

He led her across the pavement and climbed after her into the cab.

CHAPTER XXXIII

It was a long ride. In a crowded thoroughfare the horse fell on the asphalte, cutting its knees. It was up again in an instant, and lashing at the splashboard with its hind hoofs.

"The brute will break a leg presently," said Kilmorie.

He rose. Eva, in her terror, had clasped his arm. He shook off her clutch and sprang from the cab. Eva could see him struggling at the horse's head. In a few moments the trembling beast was still. Kilmorie returned to Eva, smiling, and helped her to alight.

They finished the journey in another cab. Kilmorie talked to her of the Patagonians. She sat beside him, listening, with a decorous three inches of seat between them; but all the time she seemed to feel the great, hard muscles of his arm palpitating under her hands, and to see his virile face as she had seen it at the horse's head, against a background of meaner faces.

He accompanied her to the very door of her flat. She passed into the narrow hall. The gas was lowered, and the place wore a dull, cheerless aspect. It was very cold. She passed from room to room, aimlessly, restlessly. The pictures on the walls glared at her, owlishly. Wan reflections of her face started from the gloom, mysteriously confronting her. She grew afraid of the silence and the darkness. A sense of desolation oppressed her. Her bosom ached with self-pity; the weak tears blurred her vision. She told herself, angrily:

"I am like a child in the megrims."

And a scalding tear fell upon her hand to mock her.

"I am merely tired. It is a mood that will pass."

And her body was racked with sobs.

She went to her bedroom, where a fire burned and there were bright lights. The air was warm, but she shivered. Her loneliness chilled her. She went to a window and

gazed out and upward. The sky was hung with diamonds —the frozen tears of women. She raised her clasped hands.

She undressed slowly, and crept into bed, feeling woefully weak and weary. She closed her eyes and disposed herself for slumber. But she could not sleep. Throughout the eternal night she tossed and tumbled fretfully and no rest came. In the morning she began to doze uneasily, and then it was time to be up and at work. The day stood at her bedside, heavy with its burden of duties, menacing her.

She rose at an hour later than usual, sleep clogging her brain, and dressed and washed and ate her breakfast in a giddy daze. She kissed her children, noisy at their play, and went forth to her labour.

There was a crowd in her "showroom." This was a big, oblong apartment on the first floor, furnished with wardrobes and mirrors and comfortable chairs and lounges. The "workroom" was on the floor above; a gentle, sibilant murmur proceeding from it indicated its vicinity. In the showroom Sue was sitting at a desk with a pen in her hand, talking to a lively bagman, whilst two "young ladies" displayed patterns to a fashionable mamma and daughter, and their uninteresting male escort, a leaden-eyed youth of great age. On an ottoman over against the fire sat a scion of nobility, between two Gorgons, his sisters.

On Eva's entry everybody cried:

"O, here you are at last."

"Dam pretty woman!" said the Scion, loudly.

"*Dear* Madame Eva," said the Mamma. "*Can* you do it?"

"What was the figure, Sue?"

"Thirty. You can't, you know. Thirty-five you might."

"I can knock you up something for thirty-five," said Eva to the Mamma.

"O dear, *dear*, DEAR! I *do* want one so *badly*. And I *am* so horribly poor. . . . . Adeline!"

She conferred with her daughter. The Male Escort approached Eva.

"Awfully pretty stuff—this," he said, laying a finger on some yellow satin. As he leaned over it his sallow face assumed the colour of a stewed peach.

"What do you call it, now?" he asked.

"Satin," said Eva.

He looked over his shoulder cautiously, and whispered in her ear:

"Why didn't you come?"

Her lip curled. She looked at him.

"You might at any rate have answered my note," he pursued.

"Did you send one, too?" she said.

The clever parry quite discomfited him. He shrunk back to his womenfolk, scowling.

"What do *you* think of this stuff, Harold?" asked the Mamma.

"Not much," said the Escort.

"Nonsense!" cried the Daughter. "It's just lovely."

The Gorgons united in a delicate sniff.

The Escort and the Scion fraternized.

"Dam pretty woman, Madame," said the Scion.

"Awful bad form!" said the Escort.

"What can you expect, my dear boy, in a mere dressmaker? Though they say she's somebody or other. At least, I've heard so. Lots of good people go in for trade now, you know. Lots. There's Choodney and iron, for instance."

"How *do* you think Adeline *would* look in this, Harold?" asked the Mamma.

"With her eyes, of course. Ha, ha!" said the Escort.

"I wish you would be *serious*. Look. Show him, Adeline."

The Daughter held up a slip of blue silk.

"Women are frightful bores about dress," said the Escort to the Scion.

"Dam awful!" said the Scion. "There's my two sisters now. Frightful!"

"Come, Harold," said the Daughter, dangling the fragment of blue silk before his eyes. "How should I look in this, do you think?"

"O, cold!" said the Escort.

The afternoon spun its weary length. The light changed from gold to white, from white to grey. The gas was lighted. The last customer, a withered beldame with social aspirations, departed. Eva, tearful from much yawning, haggard and peevish, toiled upstairs to her room, with a

mind swamped in the prospect of tea. Sue ran after her.

"Someone else to see you, Madame," she panted.

"I can't see anyone else. I'm too tired. Tell her to come to-morrow, if you won't do."

"It isn't a her, it's a him," said Sue.

"A gentleman?"

"I don't think he's exactly a gentleman."

"A traveller, I daresay. I can't see him. Did he give you his name?"

"No. But he said you would guess who he was."

"I can't see him. Ask him his business."

Sue ran downstairs. At the first landing she uttered a little shriek.

"O, sir!" she cried. "How you startled me! Madame Eva says she is very sorry, but she can't see you."

"Yes, she can. I'll come up," was the reply.

Eva went to the head of the stairs. John Coldershaw was ascending toward her.

"You can see me, can't you?" he said, leering.

Eva, conscious of the eyes of Sue, answered: "Yes. I didn't know it was you. Come in here."

She led him to her room. He passed in before her; she stayed to shut the door. He crossed over to the fire and warmed his hands. She sat down near the window, watching him. He turned at last and confronted her. In the act he reeled slightly, and caught at a chair for support. She saw the upward roll of his bloodshot eyeball. A sense of the hideous change in him struck her with new, sudden force, and her disgust was kindled. A score of words lay bitter on her tongue, ready for utterance. She gulped them down with a strong effort at self-control; and they stuck in her throat.

"Why have you come back?" she asked.

"Because I didn't choose to go away," he said, speaking slowly and thickly.

Still she restrained her anger.

"You said you would go," she reminded him.

"I've thought better of it," he said. "Come now."

"I am sorry," she murmured. "I had hoped you would keep your promise."

"Eh?" he shouted. "Speak up. Don't sit there mumbling. What did you say?"

"S-sh!" she whispered.

"What for? Why am I to be hushed up and hidden away? Who do you think you are, Mrs. Coldershaw, to be ashamed of me? You—you——"

He stopped and sniggered foolishly.

"You're a pretty beauty, you are," he said. "No, no, my dear, it won't do with me. You're not clever enough."

She was sick with a loathing of his presence. His coarseness, his talk that was an echo of vulgar street-chaff, his repellent person, his feeble flashiness, revolted her. She could have thrust his swollen, grinning head into the fire.

"Don't be sulky," he said. "I'm all right. I don't want to upset you."

Still she was silent. He scowled.

"Come," he said, "let's have no damned nonsense. I m not in a mood for it. And it won't do you any good, now I've found you out. It was all very well before, when I didn't know anything. Now, all that's changed. I hold the whiphand now."

She detected a threatening note in his voice and foresaw what was coming.

"When you saw me last night," she began.

"Ah, that's it—when I saw you last night," he exclaimed. "Just so. When I saw you last night."

His senseless iteration exasperated her.

"What do you mean?" she cried.

He staggered toward her.

"I know now why you wanted to pack me off," he said. "I didn't think of it at the time. You fooled me nicely. O, you can have the credit of it. I always was soft with you. You got over me somehow. I meant to go, too. I should have gone to-day if I hadn't seen you last night."

He had gripped her by the wrist, and spoke with his face bent close to hers. She shrank from contact with him, but as she retreated backward he followed her over the room.

"Stop!" he cried, at last. "Keep still, can't you. What are you afraid of?"

"Let go my wrist."

"Who is he?"

"Let me go."

"Who is he?"

"Let me go."

"Go, damn you!" He threw away her hand. "Come, now, answer me, who is he?"

"It is nothing to you."

"O, isn't it! We'll see if it's nothing to me. Am I to stand calmly by while a man makes love to my wife?"

She was tired and aching and miserable.

"Why do you come here to insult and bully me?" she cried. "Haven't you done me enough harm already? Is there no manliness in you? No pity? No gratitude? You have lied to me and robbed me. You have tried to make me hard and wicked, like yourself. I was good before I met you. I loved and trusted everybody, and it seemed that there was mostly kindness in the world. But you degraded me—you dragged me down. I might have been of use to mankind—I might have done some good, somehow—I meant to—that was my idea—but you tainted me and corrupted me—you distorted my eyes and darkened my outlook—it didn't seem much use trying to live for the good of anybody but one's self—I gave up all my ideas—I accommodated myself to you—I was meek, dutiful—you spent my money and I let you; you brought your dissolute friends, and I was—*your wife* to them. You dishonoured me, and I shared what we had left between us, though it was all mine; and I went my way and you went yours. I have not asked you to keep me. I have worked hard and honestly for myself and our children—I have lived decently and honourably, and won a good name and friends. Now you come again to break it all up. You have no mercy on me, no memory for what I have done for you, and how you have repaid me, no self-respect. You have wrecked your own life, and you want to wreck mine. You are cruel, wicked. . . . Well, I give in. I am done with struggling. It is no use. Do what you like. Take what you like. I shall let things happen. I am tired out."

She sat down and wept, not covering her face with her hands or wiping away her tears. She sat stiffly, and the great drops oozed from her eyes and ran down her cheeks, sparkling, when the light struck them, with an iridescent glitter. She wept silently and miserably.

John Coldershaw sat at the table with his chin propped in his hands.

"Come, don't cry," he said.

"I'd rather, thanks," she replied. "It does me good."

"I'm sorry. Give me a kiss and let's make it up."

"No; sit down."

"Let's be as we used to be."

"No."

"What's the good of us two going on like this—a perpetual worry to one another? We'd far better forget everything and start fresh."

"We're too stale. And everything is such a lot to forget."

"Don't cry."

She did not answer. He rose and came over to her side, slowly, awkwardly. He touched her with his hand. She started up with a broken cry, and ran away from him to the further end of the room.

"Come," he said, "that's not very nice. I don't like that."

"I don't care," she said. "You mustn't touch me."

"That's the worst of women," he said. "They always bring matters to a deadlock somewhere. What's the matter with me? I'm a proper man enough, ain't I?"

He glanced complacently at a mirror. Puppies are blind for nine days after their birth; it lasts longer with men.

She did not answer him. Her faculties were numbed; her brain seemed torpid. She sat, swaying to and fro, and weeping.

"Well, how shall it be?" asked John Coldershaw.

"I am tired," said Eva. "I can't talk to you now."

"I hate to be put off. You used to be fond enough of me."

"We grow out of things."

"You could soon work it up again."

"Work it up?"

"Every time I see you I half fall in love with you. You are such a damned, fine woman."

She smiled.

"I'm not saying it to flatter you. You are, you know. A lot handsomer than when I first knew you. More colour and substance and all that, too. You were a bit washed-out and thin in those days. Delicate looking."

"I'm sleek with happiness," she said.

"You certainly don't seem to have pined much. Come, Eva, is it worth a trial?"

"Don't ask me questions," she said. "Just talk, if you

must stop here. I'm not conversationally inclined, just now."

"I'm not going to get cross," he said, frowning and laughing. "You can sneer at me as much as you like. Perhaps I deserve it. I have been rather a cad to you, at times. But I always liked you, really. You are so clever and different and superior and unlike other women. You'd have made a glorious actress."

She regarded him through her wet eyelashes, curiously, as she would have regarded a strange, uncouth animal. Something of contempt was in her expression. She moved impatiently. He sat down before the fire with the air of a man who sees his way to the achievement of an object.

"I know why you don't answer me," he said. "You're afraid. You can't trust yourself." He shook his drunken head at her. "Old Byron was right about it. How does it go? Damned if I've touched a book for years. But it's something about love and men not thinking so much of it as women. It's rather rot, but it's true, all the same. How does it go, Eva?"

"I don't know," she said.

"Yes, you do. You're a dab at that sort of thing. But it doesn't matter." He chuckled. "I bet," he said, "you're wishing you could come back to me without appearing to give in. Ain't you, now?"

"No."

"I like you for your pluck. Look here, I'll do all the humble pie business. You do the coming back."

"No."

He laughed. "You can't deceive me," he said. "I saw it all the other night. You were soft enough, then. Of course," he hiccupped, "I don't really believe you'd carry on with anyone else. You're not one to do that sort of thing. I only said that to—to—you know. But who is he?"

"It doesn't matter."

There was a rattle of knuckles on the door, and Sue entered. She retreated in quick embarassment.

"I thought you were alone," she said, apologetically.

"What is it?"

"Nothing particular. It can wait."

Sue gazed hard at the limp figure of John Coldershaw, and retired.

"You had better go," said Eva.

"None of that," he cried. "I want an answer first."

"An answer to what?"

"What I said."

"What did you say?"

He assumed an aggrieved air.

"Don't play the fool. You know very well what I said Are we to make it up again or not?"

She did not seem to hear.

"Answer me," he said.

"What shall I say?"

"Don't speak it, kiss it."

"I'm tired. I can't think. I want to be alone. Go away."

He rose. "Don't take that line," he cried. "What do you want to try and aggravate me for?"

She roused herself.

"Don't rave," she said, peevishly. "Can't you see I'm not well?"

"You're well enough. It's temper."

She uttered no rejoinder, but lay back wearily among the sofa-cushions.

"I can't talk to you," she said. "I'm sick of everything. Why don't you go away and spend the money I gave you?"

"I'm not a child with a ha'penny. I don't like being sneered at. You had better stop it, before I get really angry."

She closed her eyes.

"Open your eyes," he shouted. "I've had enough of this damned nonsense."

Eva sat up.

"I also have had enough of it," she said. "I have told you that I am not well, that I am tired to death. I am going home."

She rang the bell. A girl appeared.

"Tell Miss Underton I am going home," Eva said. "Tell her to put everything off till to-morrow that requires me, and to do the best she can without my assistance."

"Yes, madame," said the girl, and departed.

Eva put on her bonnet and cloak. John Coldershaw rose and watched her from his position before the fire.

"Don't be a fool, Eva," he said.

"I won't," she flashed.

She went to the door. He followed her.

"I'm not to be got rid of so easily," he said.

She smiled enigmatically and walked downstairs. He walked beside her. They paced the length of a street together.

"What are you going to do?" he said.

Eva hailed a cab. The vehicle drew up in the gutter.

"Where to, sir?" said the cabman.

Eva answered: "This gentleman is not with me."

"Don't be a damned fool, Eva," said John.

"I will not have you come with me."

"Come, miss," said the cabman. "Where to?"

Eva put her foot on the iron step of the cab. John caught her dress and dragged her back. She burst into weak tears.

"Let the lady alone, can't yer," said the cabman.

"She's my wife," said John.

The cabman scratched his head. Already, a small crowd had gathered. Eva was overcome with shame and confusion. She essayed again to climb into the cab, and again John Coldershaw caught her dress and dragged her back. This time she lost her balance and fell upon her hands and knees.

"Why don't you leave the lady alone?" cried the cabman.

"I tell you she's my wife," said John.

"I don't believe yer. And whether she is or not, I'll put this whip across your face if you do that any more."

Eva was on her legs again. A faintness assailed her, and she leaned against the muddy wheel of the cab for support. The world danced for a moment. Then she collapsed and fell, huddled up, in the gutter. A dozen ready hands were stretched out to raise her. She was picked up and carried into a pastrycook's. There was a strong feeling against John Coldershaw. He stood, angrily defiant. And when Eva was carried into the shop he would have followed her. But the cabman interposed.

"Hold him, somebody," he said. "Here comes a copper. Husband or no husband, I'll give him in charge."

John Coldershaw's red face grew pallid.

"She is my wife," he said to the policeman.

"She ain't," said the cabman. "I know who she is." This was a lie, but the cabman risked it. "And he knocked her about, shameful. Blime! I'll give evidence agin him, sowelpme I will! The dirty blackguard."

"Not so much of it, cabby," said the policeman, disposed to array himself on the side of white linen and broadcloth. "You be off."

"Not me," said the cabman, valiantly. "Besides, the lady in there engaged me. You'd better look after him," indicating John Coldershaw, "instead o' meddling wi' me."

"Come, sir, you'd better move on," said the policeman to John Coldershaw. "You're causing an obstruction."

"I tell you she's my wife," said John, angrily obstinate. He was white to the lips and quite sober, now.

"I don't know anything about that," said the policeman. "I can't have you causing an obstruction."

"I'll go inside the shop, then."

"No, you won't. The crowd'll only hang about round the door, if you do."

John Coldershaw moved away. The crowd clung to his heels. He cursed them in his impotent wrath and hailed a second cab and told the driver to take him to hell. The driver may or may not have been a student of human nature. He said:

"Yes, sir."

CHAPTER XXXIV

EVA lay asleep. She lay upon a sofa with her head nestling in a cushion. Her hair was loose; one thick strand had fallen across her throat. Her face was like the white heart of a golden flower. The room was dark, save for the light of the fire—a feeble, flickering light, transmuting things. Sleep had descended on her gently, as death descends on tired men.

The servant pushed open the door.

"Mister Kilmorie, madame," she said, softly.

Eva stirred in her sleep. She murmured something that the servant was pleased to construe into, "Show him in."

Horace Kilmorie entered the room. He advanced a pace and faltered. Eva still lay upon the sofa, sleeping. His eyes softened. He came softly to her side, and stood regarding her. Her face was white and calm; her red mouth drooped wistfully.

"Poor mite!" he whispered.

He bent low over her—lower—lower—till his knees were on the carpet. His lips were very near to hers. Her pulsing breath was on his cheek.

She opened her eyes. She saw his face in the firelight, hanging above her, and smiled. She fancied that it was all a seeming, an unreality of her dreams.

"Eva," he whispered.

She smiled again; but the smile faded and her brow was puckered in an expression of pain. His lips sought her lips; his strong arm was about her. She uttered a sharp, low cry, and interposed her hands between them.

"No, no," she exclaimed, struggling to free herself.

He laughed.

"I will dispute possession of you even with yourself," he said.

"You must not," she said, pleading to him. "I am not my own."

"You are mine."

"No, no, no!" she wailed. "Let me go! It is unfair to surprise me like this. I was asleep."

He released her. His embrace left her chilled and numbed. She put her hand to her head, and her fingers were enmeshed in her flowing curls.

"Don't touch them," he said. "They are more beautiful so."

But she would not listen.

He stood before the fire, smiling at her. The moment palpitated with possibilities. Eva trembled in her weakness. He had surprised her womanhood. She was bare of resource. All the weapons of conventional feminity he had wrested from her. She summoned her dignity and stood up before him.

"I am very angry with you, Mr. Kilmorie," she said.

"I refuse to believe it," he replied.

"You—you are very rude."

He laughed.

"My poor little Eva!" was all he said.

She retorted, "You must not call me 'Eva.'"

"O, I shall," he said. "There is nothing else to call you."

"My name is Mrs. Coldershaw."

"Your nature is 'Eva!"

"Mr. Kilmorie," said Eva. "I must ask you to leave my house."

"That is unkind," he said.

"Please go."

"I shall not."

"I am not well."

"You will be worse alone."

"I must ring to have you shown out."

"I don't believe you will ring."

"O, I will," she said.

He laughed at her. She crossed to the bell and pressed her thumb upon it.

"The servant will come, you know," he said, mockingly.

The servant came. At her "Yes, ma'am," Kilmorie looked at Eva and smiled defiance. She tried to evade his gaze. She could not. The servant asked:

"Did you ring, ma'am?"

"Yes," said Eva. "Light the gas, please."

The servant obeyed and withdrew. Eva sat down and wept. Kilmorie came and sat beside her.

"Eva," he said, "don't cry. I didn't mean to hurt you. I want to make you smile for ever."

She lifted her face.

"For God's sake, go away!" she said. "I am afraid of you."

Her earnestness surprised him into gravity.

"I am come to help you," he said. "There is no need to be afraid. I want to look after you and make you happy."

"You are making me very unhappy now——" She stopped suddenly, and rose up before him. "O, it is wicked!" she cried. "I cannot listen to you. Go away, go away!"

"I will not go," he said, "until you tell me that you love me—or that you do not love me."

"You don't understand. Hasn't your sister told you? I am married. I have a husband and children."

"My sister has told me," he said. She saw his jaws set squarely. "Your husband——" he said.

"Ah, but he is my husband," she answered.

"He has usurped the title," said Kilmorie. "But I am your true husband. We were made for one another. I knew it in the first moment that I saw you."

"I must not listen. I will not."

"I am a poor lover, Eva. I never learned to sue to man or woman. I'm used to life in the rough. But I would love you well. I would take you out of this dust and smoke. I would show you the fair, virgin world. I would make life smooth for you, as it should be. You would not need to worry any more. You would have done with this pettifogging life. You would be free. You would have no fears. You would be a queen, with my heart for empire."

"I should be most miserable," she said. "Believe me, I know myself. That life would kill me."

He looked at her, frowning.

"This is my last word," she said. "Now, if you love me as you say, leave me."

He passed his hand across his forehead.

"I ought to be angry with you," said Eva. "But, God forgive me! I am not. I believe you are good. What you

have said makes no difference. I still like you and honour you. But . . . . Good-by!"

She extended her hand. He hesitated for a moment.

"Well, good-by," said he, hoarsely, and he smiled. "I don't want to make you run counter to yourself. Be yourself always, Eva. . . . . I shall carry the heft of this hand with me for a memory . . . . Good-by! . . . . I start for South Africa two days hence. Cicely goes with me. She thinks she can help me along a bit. And it isn't all a howling wilderness, you know. I mean Africa isn't."

"I must see her before she goes."

"She is coming round presently."

"It seems so sudden."

"It is the most sudden thing that has happened to me. Give me your hand again!"

"Good-by!"

"Good-by!"

He went away. She returned to the sofa and the cushions. But not to sleep. For a great while she sat very still.

She was tired. She rose wearily and began to extinguish the lights, one by one.

CHAPTER XXXV

"Six o'clock!"

John Coldershaw went to the window and looked out. The night air was thick with rolling fog: brown, where the rays of a lamp transfixed it; black, beyond. He returned, went to the table, and poured out a glass of brandy.

"Here's to him—devil take him!" he cried, and drank, thirstily.

The door was opened and a pursy little man, with a sore face and loose gait, entered.

"Damn you!" cried John Coldershaw, angrily. "I thought it was someone else. What do you want?"

"A gentleman downstairs a-askin' for you."

"Did he give his name?"

"Here's his card."

John took the card and read: "Horace Kilmorie." He rolled his tongue in his mouth. "Show him up," he said.

The pursy little man departed. Presently, Horace Kilmorie entered the room. He shut the door carefully, and stood over against it, looking intently at John Coldershaw.

"Good-evening, Mr. Kilmorie."

"Mr. Coldershaw?"

"Yes. Won't you remove your coat and come to the fire? Let me take your hat and stick."

"No, thanks."

He still stood over against the door.

"O, come to the fire."

Horace Kilmorie advanced two paces. John Coldershaw placed a chair for him.

"Do sit down," he said.

"I prefer to stand, thanks."

"As you please."

There was a long pause. The two men stood, with the table between them, stedfastly regarding each other.

"You wrote to me," said Horace Kilmorie.

"Yes."

"Mentioning the name of a lady."

"Madame Eva. Yes. Won't you sit down?"

"To the best of my belief we haven't met before, Mr. Coldershaw?"

"No. But I have seen you, once."

"Two days ago?"

"Yes."

"Outside the 'Occidental' Hotel?"

"Yes."

"I remember you now. You bowed to the lady I was with."

"Madame Eva. Yes."

"We will not mention her name."

"Come, come, why not?"

Kilmorie disregarded the words.

"How did you find out my name, Mr. Coldershaw?"

"It wasn't a difficult matter."

"You mean you bribed the porter?"

John Coldershaw laughed uneasily.

"Why not?" he said. "Anyhow, we needn't bother about it. . . . . I wish you would sit down."

Kilmorie drew a note from his pocket.

"You say you would like to see me for a few minutes about a certain lady. You want to see me '*about her*'—those are your words."

"Quite right," said John Coldershaw. "I do want to see you about her."

"Well; I am here."

"Can I offer you anything?"

"No, thank you."

"A cigar?"

"No, thank you."

"Come, Mr. Kilmorie, there is no harm in being sociable."

Horace Kilmorie laughed oddly.

"I didn't come to drink or eat or smoke with you," he said. "I am a busy man. I should be obliged if you would tell me why you want to see me."

John Coldershaw treadled the rug on which he was standing, nervously.

"I think," he said, at last. "I think you have not known—the lady—very long."

"I have not."

"You probably don't know much about her."

"No, perhaps not."

"Do you know that she has two children?"

"I do know that."

"You do."

"Yes. Why?"

"I didn't think you knew that. I suppose you think she is a widow?"

"It cannot matter to you."

"It matters a great deal, Mr. Kilmorie."

"Go on, sir. First of all, however, remember that Madame Eva is my sister's greatest friend."

"Only your sister's friend?"

Kilmorie frowned.

"There, there," said John Coldershaw. "I meant no harm. You are a man of the world, I suppose, like myself. You——"

"I am a man of the world, if that means a traveller in the five continents, but in no other sense. I never jest about women. I respect them, instead."

"So do I, so do I—no man more. But a joke! What is it? One can take women too seriously, as well as other things."

"Come to the point. Why do you want to see me!"

John Coldershaw flushed.

"You are not very civil," he said. "How do you know I am not intending you a service?"

"I know you are not."

"You can't know it."

"Men don't bribe hotel-porters in the interests of other people."

"You don't know. One man's interest can be two men's. As a matter of fact ours is a case in point. I want to serve you, because in serving you I hope to benefit myself as well."

"Well?"

"You are very much interested in Madame Eva?"

"Interested?"

"I put it like that. You must surely know what I mean."

"I am her friend."

"It's the same thing."

"Are you her friend, Mr. Coldershaw?"

"No."

"Then what right have you to discuss her with me?"

"The best right. I am her husband."

Kilmorie laughed.

"I know that," he said. "I knew it all the time. But I wanted to see you wriggle."

John Coldershaw laughed too. But his shaking hand plucked his purple lips and his jaws worked hard under the dull, loose skin of his swollen cheeks.

"Very well," he said. "It saves time. But——" He hesitated.

"Yes."

"If you knew it——"

He hesitated again. Horace Kilmorie fumbled impatiently with the handle of his stick.

"Go on," he said.

"I'll put it another way," said John Coldershaw. "You say you are a friend of my wife's."

"Yes."

"Does that—does friendship quite express—— Eh, you know what I mean.

"You are unfolding yourself, Mr. Coldershaw," said Kilmorie. "I do begin to see what you mean, I think."

"I mean—— Well, plainly, you are in love with her?"

Horace Kilmorie was silent.

"Out with it, man," said John Coldershaw. "After all, it's nothing to be ashamed of. I've loved married women myself."

He laughed loudly. Horace Kilmorie looked at him through narrowed eyelids.

"Well, we'll say I love her," said he.

"Just for the sake of argument. Ha, ha!"

"Don't laugh, Mr. Coldershaw. I have told you that I don't jest about women."

"That's all right, I was laughing at you."

"A man laughed at me in an American saloon once," said Kilmorie.

"Ah!"

"He never laughed at anybody or anything again. I broke his jaw."

"Serve him right for being a little man. I don't like little men."

"He wasn't a little man. He was somewhere about your height and weight."

John Coldershaw sniggered and poured out some brandy and drank it.

"Come, come, Mr. Kilmorie," he said; "you don't think to frighten me, do you? Faugh, man! don't be such damned bad company. Take off your coat. Draw up to the fire. Drink; smoke. Let us look at the thing comfortably."

But Horace Kilmorie stood aloof, silent, stiff, severe.

"I want to know," he said, "why you brought me here."

"Perhaps I wanted to see what sort of a fool-man it was that loved my wife?"

"You are drunk," said Kilmorie.

"I? No, no. I am cursed with a stronger head than that. I——"

"Then there is no excuse for you."

"What do you mean?" cried John Coldershaw. Kilmorie had advanced toward him. "What are you going to do?"

"I am going to sit down," said Kilmorie, and dropped into a chair.

Coldershaw laughed boisterously.

"That's better," he said, and sat down also. "The brandy is at your elbow."

"Will you tell me why you brought me here?"

"Eh? Yes, of course—— In the first place, my wife and I do not love one another. Perhaps, as she has told you so much, you know that, too."

"I understand that you have lived apart for some years."

"That's it. We have. We got tired of our married life and separated. She goes her way; I go mine. We don't interfere with one another. We each do as we like—within limits, of course. Er—you make it damned hard for a fellow."

"I?"

"You must know what I am driving at. She would be glad to get rid of me altogether. Perhaps, she has somebody else in her eye. I can't say. I don't know. What I do know is this: A few days ago she gave me some money to go abroad with."

"Was that the understanding?"

"That was it."

"And you haven't gone?"

"I didn't know about you, then. I found out the next day. Then, I thought I'd stay on a bit to look after her." He laughed. "Last night I lost the money she gave me at cards."

"That was unfortunate."

"It was horribly unfortunate. If I hadn't lost it I should have used it to pay my passage to America. I should have started to-morrow. And she wouldn't have been troubled with me any more. As it is, lack of means compels me to stay here and look after her. You understand?"

"I understand perfectly."

John Coldershaw leaned back in his chair and crossed his legs. For five minutes Horace Kilmorie did not speak. Then he rose and went to the window.

"The fog is thinning," he said. "I shall go home."

"But——" began John Coldershaw.

"Come with me," said Kilmorie.

"What for?"

"I neglected to bring my cheque-book. It isn't far. We'll walk together across the park."

"It's such a fag. I'd rather not. You know where I am if you want to write."

"I never write that sort of letter. If you won't come there's an end of the matter. Good-night."

"I'll come. I'm glad you see the thing in a sensible light."

"I wasn't quite sure that I understood you at first."

"And you were delicate of—— I see, I see. Don't worry to explain. I knew you were a man of the world at once. You are a man of the world—I don't care what you say. You may deny it as much as you please. It's a pity we fenced so much."

"Come along. I'm in rather a hurry."

"I won't keep you a moment."

He staggered from the room. Presently he returned, attired for walking. They went downstairs together. John Coldershaw's rooms formed part of a public-house.

"Have just one," he said, as they passed the door of the bar. "It will keep the fog out."

But Kilmorie refused.

They passed into the street, side by side. There was a faint wind stirring. The fog went rolling on like a turbid river. It wound about them in great, curling spirals; its touch upon their faces was as the sharp impact of a cold, clammy hand. Outside the circle of their vision the darkness rose sheer about them like a wall, so that they might have been at the foul bottom of a huge mud-well. The streets were strangely silent and deserted; their wonted tumult was mellowed and softened. There was an occasional cry or other noise proceeding from afar off that came to them as light clogged with smoke—impalpable, conglomerate. In the busier thoroughfares through which they passed great amorphous vehicles lumbered past, nebulous, ill-defined under gleaming oil-skin—drivers, bearing torches, walking at the slipping, straining horses' heads.

"What a cursed night!" growled John Coldershaw.

"Here is the park," said Kilmorie.

A policeman was standing at the gate. He touched his hat and said:

"Be careful, gentlemen, that you don't lose your way."

"I know the path," Kilmorie answered. "I sha'n't try short cuts across the grass to-night."

They passed between the high, shining gates.

"How horribly dark it is!" said John Coldershaw.

"We know our way. You aren't afraid?"

"I afraid!" He laughed, and they proceeded.

They had gone a hundred yards, when Kilmorie stopped suddenly.

"What's the matter?" asked John Coldershaw.

"I was thinking that you are a pretty poor sort of scoundrel, Mr. John Coldershaw," said Kilmorie.

They were near enough to a light for their faces to be clearly visible to one another. Outside the blot of yellow radiance in which they stood, the blackness spread, like death, into infinity. John Coldershaw had wound a silk neckcloth about his throat before sallying forth; above it his face showed through the gloom, blue with cold, haggard with apprehension; his hair stuck out under the rim of his hat, in heavy clots, dank and black, about his ears and over his forehead; his strong white teeth, visible

through his parched, purple lips, chattered loudly. He looked at Kilmorie and asked, shivering;

"What do you mean?"

Kilmorie laughed.

"Will you fight, or take it quietly?" he said.

"You—you——"

"Put your hands up."

"Are you going to—to murder me?"

"I am going to thrash you. You are not worth thrashing. But I cannot forego the luxury."

John Coldershaw turned to run.

Kilmorie caught his arm and swung him round and shook him.

"You dirty cur!" he said. "You filthy hound!" And he struck out with his clenched fist. John Coldershaw went down with his mouth widened across his face in a gory streak. He lay for a moment, spitting and bubbling, then rose and put up his hands. He was down again in an instant, rolling over on the narrow path with his face in the glistening gravel. He lay where he fell. Kilmorie went to him and spurned him with his foot.

"Get up," he said.

"Help!" screamed the prostrate man. "Murder!"

But his voice beat against the fog in vain; he was strangled with his own blood.

"Get up," said Kilmorie.

"Don't hit me," whined John Coldershaw. "I'm not a strong man. I'm ill. It will be my death."

"Get up."

"Give me a chance when I am up. I wasn't ready. Give me a chance."

"Will you fight?"

"Give me a chance and I will."

"You shall have a minute. I don't want to take you at a disadvantage. Get up."

John Coldershaw rose and tottered to a seat and sank down limply, with his head on his knees. Kilmorie began to count.

"At sixty I shall hit you again," he said.

"For God's sake don't. What have I ever done to you?"

"Fourteen—fifteen—sixteen—

"It's murder."

"Nineteen—twenty—"

"I'll go away from England."

"Twenty-five — twenty-six — twenty-seven — twenty-eight—twenty-nine—half-time."

John Coldershaw looked up, groaning, and buried his broken face in his hands again. Suddenly, at "forty-five," he struck Kilmorie hard in the stomach, a foul blow. Kilmorie staggered back, gasping, and fell. John Coldershaw ran to him, where he lay, and essayed to kick his head. But Kilmorie was too quick, he seized the flying boot, put his weight under it, and threw his antagonist into the air. John Coldershaw fell sprawling on his belly, close to the other's hand. They clinched.

"You coward!" gasped Kilmorie, as they struggled. John Coldershaw was feeling for Kilmorie's eyes with a hard, grinding thumb. Panting, straining, striking, they wrestled blindly on the iron-bound earth, from side to side of the path. Their trail blackened the silver frost; their hot breath rose about them in a white cloud, mingling with the shifting brown haze. Once John Coldershaw seized Kilmorie's hand between his jaws and broke a finger with his teeth. It cracked like a snapped icicle. They got upon their knees, still clasped, the one to the other in an ironic embrace. A wrench, and they were on their feet again, and apart. They countered and fell away, half-down. They rose and sparred, round and round, slowly. Kilmorie was half-doubled. John Coldershaw's face was dabbled with tears and salt sweat and bitter blood; but he grinned through his broken red hole of a mouth, like a stricken wolf. Again they countered. There was a splush-slup of flesh and John Coldershaw reeled down, and lay, supine.

"Get up!" cried Kilmorie, kicking him.

But the fallen man did not stir. His hideous face showed rigid in the yellow light. Blood dripped—dripped on the exposed bosom of his torn, bespattered shirt; a heavy column of steam ascended slowly from his sweating head.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

KILMORIE walked away, leaving John Coldershaw prostrate on the earth.

The wind freshened. The turbid river of fog rolled faster, faster, till it was caught up and swept away to swell the clouds. Stars gleamed, and the moon flooded the world with blue effulgence.

Two keepers, wandering with lanterns through the gravel paths in quest of waste humanity huddled on benches, discovered John Coldershaw. He was moaning in delirium. They picked him up and carried him to the gate. An ambulance was fetched and he was taken to a hospital and carefully tended. He had a broken rib and a broken nose; his upper lip was split; there were deep gashes in his head and face; and a shoulder was dislocated. But more serious in its likely effects on a system weakened by debauch, was his long exposure in the cold and damp. The blood had clotted in his wounds; his limbs were numbed and rigid. For two unresting days and nights the doctors wrestled hard with death in his unworthy behoof.

There were found on his person cards bearing his name, but no address. His case was reported in the newspapers in a few curt paragraphs with his name appended. Said the report: "He has not yet been identified; but the police are making diligent inquiries with a view to the speedy apprehension of his assailant or assailants."

On the third day John Coldershaw recovered consciousness and spoke. But he had bitten on his tongue and could form no intelligible utterance. His speech was broken and muffled. The third day was Sunday, and even whilst he babbled impotently his wife was reading a newspaper in which his name appeared. She read the headline "A Murderous Outrage," under which the report of his case was printed; but, not having a stomach that relished crude sensations and not deeming the matter of special interest

to her, she passed it by. Thus, she remained ignorant of John Coldershaw's misadventure, and was spared the effort to solve a hard problem in casuistry.

One man saw the report, however, and was moved to quick pity. He came to the hospital and was shown John Coldershaw, lying bandaged, with a sweat of agony damp on his brow.

"Jack, old fellow," said this man, "I'm sorry." And he clasped the idle hand outside the coverlet. John Coldershaw burst into vehement incoherence.

"You can't make him out, I suppose, any more than the rest of us?" the nurse asked, anxiously.

"No, I'm afraid not," was the reply.

"Do you know his people? Has he a wife?"

"He has a mother, I will let her know."

John Coldershaw nodded his head, violently.

"Shall I let her know, Jack?" said the man.

Again, John Coldershaw nodded his head.

The man, whose name was Richard Underton, went away to his home in a remote suburb and conferred with his buxom sister, Sue.

"Serves him right, the villain!" said Sue. "*I* haven't any pity for him."

"We were friends once," said Dick. "I can't help being sorry for him."

"I wish he'd die," said Sue, vindictively. "It would be the best thing in the world for poor Madame."

Dick shook his head in mild deprecation.

"You mustn't let *her* know," said Sue. "I won't have it. She's been quite herself again for the last few days. It would only upset her."

"She doesn't suspect that you know all about her, does she?" Dick asked, anxiously.

"I've never once breathed a word to her about it."

"Old Cleogh would rage if you did."

"You can trust me, Dick."

"I know I can, old girl," said her brother, and kissed her. They were very happy and prosperous now. He added: "I think I'll go out in the garden" (Dick had become an enthusiastic amateur gardener; he thought it a splendid playground for the intellect) "and smoke a pipe and think things over."

The outcome of his deliberations was a short letter to

Mrs. Coldershaw, John's mother, who lived still in the house sacred to the memory of her husband and son. The lonely woman read it at her breakfast-table on the morning of the next day and her heart stirred quickly in her withered bosom and her hard eyes softened.

"I will go to him, my son," she said.

And she rose up, trembling, in haste, and went out at once and walked to the hospital gates, taking no heed of the snow that fell thickly in the streets beyond that it clogged her feet.

"I am his mother," she said to the grim porter.

She was taken to his bedside. He slept. She knelt down on the boards and kissed his hand and cried. He awoke, scowling with pain, and saw the head that he had whitened and the face that he had furrowed. He moaned and suffered her caresses, restlessly.

"Come home to me again," she whispered.

He murmured something and his hand tightened on her hand.

"When can he be moved?" she asked the doctor. "I want him to come home to me."

"Perhaps in a few days," the doctor answered.

"I may stay with him now?"

"You mustn't excite him."

"I will be still." She smiled. "I am his mother," she said again, proudly.

END OF FOURTH STAGE

Fifth Stage

The Outcome

CHAPTERS XXXVII–XLII

CHAPTER XXXVII

THUS it came to pass that John Coldershaw returned to his old home, where all was as it had ever been, saving a living presence. He returned on a bleak, grey afternoon in February. A muffin-man was swinging his bell and crying his wares; a few blue-nosed, purple-cheeked children were playing "hopscotch," indomitably, on the pavement before the house at which the cab stopped. Mrs. Coldershaw chided the children shrilly as she had chided them when John was a little boy with secret sympathies and the children retorted with the old, historic slang that had once been familiar on his own lips, their thin voices and elfin forms fading into the misty distance, imperceptibly.

"Saucy little brats!" said Mrs. Coldershaw. She had alighted before him and addressed him from the kerb. "Come, dear," she said, and gave him her hand that was like a parchment bag filled with loose bones, and helped him to alight; for he was scarcely able to walk yet.

He tottered across the pavement into the house. They went into the scarlet parlour that he had been wont to scoff at in the days of his irresponsible youth. His mother led him to the fire which was burning in the ornate grate that seldom held fire before, and set him down in the wide arm-chair, usually sacred to shockheaded Mr. McWirtrie.

"How do you feel now, dear?" she asked with tender solicitude.

He replied with a gesture of feeble irritation.

"I'll bring you a pillow for your head," she said. "Let me put the stool right."

She knelt down at his feet.

"That's all right," he said, thickly.

He had not quite recovered the free use of his tongue. He stretched his languid hands to the blaze.

"I'm damned cold," he said.

She winced at the oath.

"I'll light the gas. It'll make it warmer," she answered.

He looked about him.

"Nothing altered," he said. "Where's father?"

She started from her knees.

"I—told—you," she faltered.

"He's dead, of course. I forgot. I can't remember things, somehow. I'm all thick inside my head."

"He died ever so long ago—soon after you went away."

"Yes, yes. . . . Light the gas, mother."

She turned away.

"We'll have tea in here, dear, just to keep up the occasion," she said, when she had lit the gas, in obedience to his imperious command. "There ain't ever been tea eaten in this room before — not a reg'lar set-down tea, that is."

She sat down beside him and looked into his face. "Do I tire you with my talk?" she asked.

"No," he said.

"I've got some Sally Lunns for you. You used to be awful fond o' Sally Lunns."

"Did I?"

"Don't you remember! And some sardines. Is there anythink else you think you'd fancy? The gel can easy go and get it."

"I don't fancy anything at all much."

"Ah, you're a bit down, that's what it is, dear. You'll feel more peckish when you've got a cup o' tea inside you, I'll be bound." She rang the bell.

A servant came, a new creature, but loose-heeled and underfed and overworked as her many predecessors.

"Yes, 'm?" she said, staring at John's scarred face in open-mouthed surprise.

"Tea, Mary."

"Yes, 'm. Where 'm?"

"In here."

"In *here*, 'm!"

"Yes, yes. Be quick."

John Coldershaw looked up and met the girl's eyes, set intently on him.

"What are you looking at?" he snapped.

The girl departed hastily, in confusion.

"She was laughing at my face, mother."

"No, no, dear."

"She was. I saw her. Tell her not to look at me, mother. I don't like it."

"I will discharge her altogether if she annoys you."

"That's it. Discharge her." He felt his scars with his hand. "They're going," he said. "I shall be all right soon, eh?"

"Yes, dear. They don't notice—much."

He relapsed again into apathy. The girl entered with a tray and prepared the table for tea. This time he kept his face averted from her. He ate little, and only spoke in answer to his mother. She was very voluble.

"Tell me when you're going to ring," he said, "and I'll get into the chair. I don't want her to be staring at me like that again."

"Shall I ring now?"

"Yes, ring now. No, give me a hand first."

She helped him into the chair, and he turned his brooding gaze to the fire.

"It's rotten being like this," he said. "I hope I shall get well soon. But there doesn't seem to be any power in my legs."

"It was the frost done that, dear."

"I know who it was," he answered.

The table being cleared, they sat over the fire, side by side.

"Can I do anythink to amuse you, dear?" his mother asked.

"No."

"You wouldn't care for me to read to you?"

"You can't read well enough."

"I've improved a lot lately. Being so lonely I fell back on it like. Let me try.

"No."

"Very well, dear."

She respected his mood and was silent. It irked her to remain there, idle, but she would not leave him. Thus, they sat for the space of two hours. He seemed quite unconscious of her presence. At long intervals she spoke to him and he answered her.

"Perhaps you're tired," she said; "and would like to go to bed?"

"Yes," he replied. "I'll go to bed."

"Your old room is jest the same as ever. All the pipes and everythink is there."

"Ah!"

"Don't you want to see it?"

"Eh? Yes, if you like."

"I'll go and see if it's all ready for you."

She quitted the room, leaving him alone. He seemed not to mark her departure. He crouched, listless and preoccupied, his shoulders hunched high, his elbows propped on the broad arms of the chair.

She had almost to carry him upstairs. She helped him to undress, and he crept into bed.

"If there were a fire?" he said, suddenly.

"There won't be, dear. I'm too careful for that."

"I shouldn't be able to get out. I should be burned to death."

"It isn't worth worrying about."

He looked at her. "No; I suppose not," he said.

"Are you quite comfortable?"

"Yes."

She stooped and kissed him.

"Good-night, my boy," she whispered.

"Don't go away and leave me," he said, querulously. "Stop here a bit till I fall asleep."

"Yes, dear."

She sat down. He lay staring up at her—his face was very awful. Presently, he fell asleep. She stayed an hour ere she moved. Before she went out she kissed his broken mouth again, and left a tear glittering on his cheek. She slept in a room adjoining, with the door of communication open. In the night, she heard his hoarse voice calling her:

"Mother, mother!"

She remembered how he had called her when he was a little child, frightened by dreams. She ran to him, carrying a candle.

"What is it, dear?" she whispered.

"The candle will go out and I shall be in the dark," he cried hoarsely. "I couldn't bear that."

She lit a fresh candle, and endeavoured to reassure him. His face was drawn and stark with fear.

"It might happen any night," he said.

"I'll see that it doesn't. I'll be very partic'lar."

He lay down again, trembling, and closed his eyes. His mother moved away; but he caught at her hand.

"Don't go yet. I'm not asleep," he said.

She stayed, holding his hand. It was very cold and she wore only a thin nightgown. It was long ere his grasp relaxed and she could move without fear of awaking him.

His progress toward recovery was slow. At the end of a fortnight he had gained sufficient strength to enable him to crawl painfully about the house with the aid of a stick. The tap-tap-tapping of his prop on the wooden stairs became a familiar sound in his mother's ears. He was like a sick child, aimlessly petulant.

"Wouldn't you like to smoke?" his mother asked him one day.

"No," he said. "I don't care about it."

"I've bin thinking," she said; "you might go out in a bath-chair sometimes. The air 'ud do you good."

"I sha'n't go out in a bath-chair. Everybody would see my face. Do you think it will be better soon?"

"Yes, yes," she answered.

"Will there be any scars, do you think?"

"Not to show."

She spoke very doubtfully.

"Some of my teeth are gone," he said, fingering his wounded gums. "I must get some false ones. Could you get a dentist to come?"

"I'll see about it to-day. . . . . I wish, dear, you could think of something to do to amuse yourself. You seem to be gettin' so low."

"I don't want to do anything."

His mother was silent. Presently she said, advancing the proposition timidly:

"I've bin thinkin', dear, you might like to come with me across to the 'All?"

He looked at her, frowning.

"What would be the use of that?" he asked.

"It might cheer you up, dear, that's all."

He turned away from her and did not reply. She waited for some minutes, then she said:

"You don't care about it, I suppose?"

"Eh? Yes, I'll go."

He answered irritably, as if to silence her. But he adhered to his word. Mrs. Coldershaw had not expected him to assent to her proposition, so diffidently advanced; and she was wild with joy at her success.

The service was short, and, the weather being very inclement, only a few worshippers were present. But it was the proudest hour in Mrs. Coldershaw's life. She was drunk with pride. She had never dared to hope—only to dream—that she would ever sit beside her son in a House of God and hear prayers. The filmy ambition of her life was realised. In her supreme exaltation of spirit she could not forbear to glance occasionally at her neighbours, to mark if they were duly impressed by the presence of her son in that place. They were impressed. It was felt that the occasion demanded special effort. Mr. McWirtrie wrestled mightily with God for the salvation of John Coldershaw's soul. John Coldershaw sat listening, unmoved.

"Perhaps Brother Coldershaw will give testimony," said the minister, at the conclusion of his address.

A murmur of excitement rippled through the room. Fifty heads were turned on the instant.

"Come, Brother Coldershaw," said Mr. McWirtrie.

John laughed softly.

"Scoffer!" hissed the ladies of the congregation.

"Well, well, another time, then," said Mr. McWirtrie. "Brother Wardrop."

Mr. Harry Wardrop, the converted prize-fighter from heathen Wapping, rose at once. There was a buzz of approbation.

"Dear brothers and sisters in Christ," said Mr. Wardrop, "I rise up with a grateful 'art to praise God that here we are at the close of another day 'ale and well as ever. I didn't reckon on sayin' a word to-night, but as I feel I've 'ad a call, I will jest make a few remarks, and chance it. You all know very well what sort of a man I was before I turned to Christ. I was a blasphemer; I was a drunkard; I was everything that was bad. But—praise be to God!—I see the error of my ways in time, and give it all up. . . . ." There followed a long digression on the mutability of human existence. He continued: "How did I go on in them days? I was never sober, for a start. I drank like a fish. I was always drinking. I knoo that when I was drunk I couldn't think or feel, and I didn't want to think or feel. It was my delight to get together with a lot of pal—ungodly companions and set round a table in a taproom, and drink and smoke and sing and talk, till chuckin'-out time. I thought I was happy in so doing. I

didn't know better. O, what a pore, wicked fool I was in them days!" He paused. John Coldershaw raised his head and turned his face to the speaker. "But that wasn't the wust of it," continued Mr. Wardrop. "There was lower depths than that. Drunkenness is a sin bad enough in itself, but it's nothing to the other sins what it leads you into. It takes you into bad comp'ny. It makes you run after the Scarlet Woman. O, the wicked Scarlet Woman, with her false smiles and her evil 'art, that beguile you into sin!"

At this point was much groaning. John Coldershaw's hand wandered up to his scarred face; his mother bent her head. Mr. Wardrop added a few hortatory phrases and sat down. He would not have made an end so soon, but his wife was tugging gently at his coat-tails.

Over the supper-table John said:

"I sha'n't go any more."

His mother's face grew dismal; she had been smiling.

"Why not?" she asked.

"I sha'n't go," he repeated.

The tears started to her eyes. She bent her face close to her plate.

"Didn't you like it?" she asked, huskily.

"I didn't think of it," he replied. "I went because I thought I would, that was all. . . . . Is there any beer in the house?"

"Heaven forbid!" said Mrs. Coldershaw, unctuously.

"What!" he cried.

She added, mildly: "You know I've always bin a teetotaler, dear. I've never allowed beer in the house."

He grinned.

"O, all right," he said. "But I should like some."

"You've done without it for nearly a month," she said. "Don't you think you might give it up altogether, now?"

"No," he said, shortly.

She forbore to press her point. The meal was finished in silence.

"I'm going to get well," he said, as he went up to bed.

In the morning Mr. McWirtrie called.

"Ah, dear brother," he said to John. "And how is our dear brother? How does he feel this morning?"

"Damned unbrotherly," snarled John.

Mrs. Coldershaw cried out. Mr. McWirtrie's geniality

was frozen up. He could say nothing. He departed, his face full of trouble.

"O, sir," the mother said; "please don't mind him. He's not bin hisself since his accident."

"Poor fellow!" the minister said. "The devil's got a hard grip on him, I'm afraid."

They spoke at the street door.

"I believe he'll come to see the light in time," Mrs. Coldershaw said. "I pray every night."

"God bless you for it!" ejaculated the minister.

He went away and Mrs. Coldershaw returned to the room where her son was. He sat drooping over the fire.

"Don't let that damned fool come here again, mother," he said.

"Oh, Jack, don't talk like that. He's a dear good man."

John Coldershaw laughed contemptuously.

The days spun their weary length of hours. Winter gave place to spring. The weather was still cold, but the days were lengthening. There was much rain. At night mother and son would sit facing the fire from opposite ends of the fender while the rain splashed on the windows and dripped, dripped from the overhanging eaves. Mrs. Coldershaw, in the after years, always associated this period of reunion with the sound of rain. For a great time John spoke no word of his wife or the other concerns that had occupied him during his absence from his mother. One evening, however, he suddenly reverted of his own will to that part of his life.

"Do you know what I am always thinking about?" he said.

He had been lying prone on the sofa; but as he spoke he raised himself slowly on his elbow and set his gaze on his mother. She shook her head.

"I think of *her*," he said.

"Who?"

"Eva."

"Eva?"

"She was my wife."

"Her name was Eva?"

"Of course—Eva."

He lapsed into brooding silence. Presently he stirred again.

"I think of those others, too," he said. "Hetty and Alice and all those. They come in, somehow; but I think of them only in relation to her, Eva."

"They were wicked women."

"They were dirt," he said, "But *she* wasn't, you know. She was good. And everything went right with her."

He became silent again.

"I was bad," he said, presently. "And everything went wrong. That was the difference between us."

"Is she dead or what," asked Mrs. Coldershaw. "I don't know nothing of her at all. You've never told me. I want to hear about her."

He told the story of his married life, simply, truthfully. It was curious to hear him. No man ever made out a worse indictment of another than did John Coldershaw of himself. Yet his mother's sympathies were all for him, her son. She, the eminently just, allowed her judgment to be warped with prejudice.

"My poor boy, my poor boy!" she cried, at the conclusion of his story. "No wonder you've gone wrong. Oh, what a bad woman this is!"

"No," he said; "she is the best woman in the world—and everything goes right with her."

He spoke softly, dully; but suddenly his mood altered, a feeble flush mantled in his cheek, his voice grew loud.

"That is why I hate her," he said, a frown wrinkling his brows; "because she is so good and everything goes right with her—because I'm bad and everything goes wrong with me."

CHAPTER XXXVIII

His progress toward recovery now became more rapid. He was able soon to go on short walks abroad. His illness had greatly debilitated him. He went with a slight limp; his shoulders were a little hunched; and he stooped. His gait was uncertain; his limbs were withered; he had lost entirely all precision of action. He would grab three times at a thing before seizing it. His mind was affected also; he became a strange compound of simplicity and cunning, as an evil child is. As his strength increased his moods became more variable. He was usually morose and silent or restless and loquacious; occasionally he would be aroused to sullen anger or grow lachrymose and weep. He grew curiously mischievous and cruel. One day he caught the house-cat and slit its throat with a tiny penknife, so that it died. He was terribly torn in the encounter, but he seemed not to have heeded the pain. He showed his ensanguined hands in triumph to his mother.

"It dragged itself along all down the stairs," he said, "rolling over, rolling over—till it died. This is its blood and mine, all mixed."

His mother grew fearful for his reason. It was in her mind to consult a doctor, but she feared lest he should command her son's immediate incarceration. She was haggard and distraught with the burden of her own counsel.

"I can't bear to let him go again," she told God. "My life is so empty without nothink to love. I can't forget all them there lonely years. Help me to do that which is right in Thy sight, O God; but don't take him away from me."

She prayed on her knees always, aspiring to perfect piety. Nevertheless to her limited understanding it seemed a right and wise thing, this giving of advice to the Omniscient, Omnipotent One.

She ventured to remonstrate with her son.

"It was very cruel to kill the cat," she said. "What did you do it for?"

"I wanted to," he said. "It aggravated me—sitting there so quiet."

He would say no more, and when she remonstrated further he listened without replying. But for ten days he relapsed into his pristine state of dull apathy, sitting apart in glowering silence all day. His conduct was characterised by no eccentricity beyond the slow preoccupation of manner that now seemed habitual to him. On the tenth day he said to his mother:

"I should like to see her again."

His mother asked, "Your wife?"

"Yes," he nodded.

Mrs. Coldershaw was startled and distressed.

"What for?" she stammered.

"I want to see her again. It would do me good."

He looked up with the frown smoothed from his brow for the first time. His mother had no words to reply with. He went from the room softly. He ascended the stairs to his own little private den and sat down at the writing-table there and spread out a sheet of paper and took a pen in his hand. He dipped the pen in the ink and thought awhile; but nothing came of his deliberations. He arose and went to a corner where a crowd of bottles were. He took them in his hand one by one and examined them leisurely. They were all empty. His mother had not troubled to remove them—for sentimental reasons. He stood debating in the centre of the room. Then he went to a small oak cabinet. It was locked and the key had been lost. He forced it open with a penknife. There were six or seven bottles filled with spirit in the cabinet. He drew out the first to hand and carried it to the writing-table, chuckling. Since his illness he had not tasted alcoholic liquor. He poured out two brimming glasses of brandy and drank them slowly, one after the other. His face became inflamed and his eye dim; but the spirit had no other effect on him. He cursed it and hurled the two empty glasses in the fireplace, where they shivered to splinters on the iron bars.

His mother, in the room below, heard the clatter and came panting upstairs to the door of his room. She entered, crying out:

"What is it you've done now?"

"Shut up!" he said. "I've only broken two glasses."

She glanced at the half-emptied bottle on his writing-table.

"Oh, Jack, you haven't bin drinking?" she exclaimed.

"The stuff's like water," he said.

"Don't drink it."

He looked at her and sniggered.

"Shall if I like," he made answer.

She would have spoken again, but he interrupted her.

"Go away," he said. "I want to write something."

She lingered for a moment, then departed. He sat down at the writing-table once more and wrote. He wrote slowly, but without pause.

I want to see you again, Eva. Let me see you. You can come here or I will come to you. But I must see you. I do not want any money from you. I am all right for money. I am living with my mother, and she will give me some money if I want it. I only want to see you. Let me see you.

He added his name and address and went downstairs, carrying the letter in his hand. He showed it to his mother. She spelt her way through it slowly and then looked at him with inquiring eyes.

"What do you want to see her for?" she asked.

"I don't know," he answered. "I only know that I want to see her. Do you think she'll come?"

"How can I tell?"

He rubbed his chin.

"I would go to her," he said; "but——" he stopped.

"Don't go to her," his mother entreated. "Don't ask her to come here. Let me tear up the letter." She put her thumbs to it.

"No," he shouted, putting a restraining hand upon her arm. "If you tear it up, I'll—I'll——"

He subsided into glowering silence.

"I *would* go to her," he continued, after a pause, "only I'm afraid."

"Afraid!"

"Yes," he said, his voice quavering. "She might set that murderer at me again. He would kill me this time." He sat down and began to sob like a whipped boy. "The great coward!" he said. "I was ill, too."

His mother had a feeling of something akin to contempt for her son; but it passed, and she pitied him.

"What do you want to go and mix yourself up with her again for!" she said. "Why don't you have done with her once for all?"

"I wish I could," he said; "but I can't. She's got a power over me somehow. I'm always thinking about her. . . . . Give me the letter. I want to send it."

"Let me tear it up," she said, withholding it from him.

He sprang forward and wrested it from her clutch.

"You hurt me," she said, angrily.

"I don't care," he returned.

He went from the room, and upstairs. He put the letter in an envelope, addressed it, and went out straightway to the nearest pillar-box.

The answer came two days later. It was not written by Eva, but by her solicitor, Mr. Henson Cleogh. This is what it said:

Sir,—I have been consulted by my client, Madame Eva, of ——, with reference to a letter sent to her by you on the 14th inst. She has instructed me to inform you that she desires no further intercourse with you, that she will not answer your letters or consent to meet you. You have only to refer to the Deed of Arrangement, dated the 3rd of August, 18— (copy of which I beg to enclose), entered into by you with a perfect knowledge of its contents, to see that she is entirely within her legal right in acting thus, and I have to warn you that if you persist in your unmanly conduct towards her I shall be compelled to take criminal proceedings against you for her full protection, under the Non-Molestation Clause in the aforesaid Deed of Arrangement.—I am, Sir, your obedient servant,

HENSON CLEOGH.

John Coldershaw, Esq.

He showed the solicitor's letter to his mother. She was greatly frightened by it.

"For goodness gracious sake keep clear of her, dear," she said. "You don't know what trouble you may get into, meddlin' with deeds and things. . . . . Ah, she's a wicked creature, take my word for it!"

"She's not."

"She must be. Didn't she promise to 'love, honour'——?"

"She's not wicked," he reiterated, obstinately.

"Well, well, she's not then. But you'll keep clear of her."

"Eh? Yes, I suppose so."

"It's a terrible thing going agin law'ers. You never know where they'll have you. They'll land you in prison as soon as look at you."

"I wish I could think better," said John Coldershaw. "But my brains are all wrong now." He began to whimper feebly. "Everything's wrong with me," he said.

She soothed him, taking him in her arms, kissing his unsightly face.

"I'd like to do the same to her as I did to the cat, I would," he said suddenly.

She thrilled with nameless horror at his words, shrinking away from him.

"Don't talk so," she said. "It's terrible!"

He bit his discoloured lips, and began to laugh.

"Damn it all!" he said. "If she can do without me I can do without her. I'm as good as she is."

"Better, dear, a thousand times."

He became grave again.

"No," he said, "after all, she *is* good."

He drank himself into a state of insensibility that evening. His mother found him on the floor at midnight. Weeping, she dragged him to his bed in the adjoining room and left him sleeping there. Lying in her own restless bed, she could hear him raving raucously in his drunken half-sleep.

He was very ill in the morning, and did not come down to breakfast. His mother prepared a tasty repast for him with her own hands, and carried it to him; but he could not eat. He lay, tossing and moaning, with his thick grey hair dishevelled, and his scars showing hideously red against the blue-white background of his face. He had broken one wound in the corner of his mouth, and the blood, oozing from it, stained his chin and throat. In the evening he dressed, and, creeping softly downstairs, surprised his mother in her sitting-room. She had fallen asleep in her chair, worn-out and weary after her night's vigil. His footfall awoke her, and she started up with a shriek.

"Give me some money," he said.

She put her hand in her pocket and, not withdrawing it, asked him:

"What for?"

"To spend," he said. "I'm going out."

"Going out!" she cried.

"Yes," he said.

"You are not well enough to go out," she said.

"I am well enough," he rejoined, impatiently. "Give me some money."

"O, don't go out. It'll do you more good to stop in."

"I want to go out."

She handed him a sovereign. He looked at it and put it in his pocket.

"That's not enough," he said.

"It's all I have," she said, "without drawing a cheque."

"Well, draw a cheque," he answered. "Give me my year's allowance."

"No," she said. "You might go away and not come back."

"I'll go away and not come back if you don't," he retorted. "Come, give me a year's allowance."

"We haven't decided what it's to be yet."

"A hundred will do for the present."

She started up, gasping:

"A hundred *pounds*, do you mean?"

He nodded.

"A hundred pounds to spend in waste! What do you want with a hundred pounds? I'll pay all your bills for clothes and things. Why, do you know how much your poor dear father spent on himself?"

"He wasn't a gentleman like me."

"Half-a-crown a week."

"I must have some money."

"But a hundred pounds! We should soon be in the poorhouse at that rate."

"I used to have more than that."

"You never did."

She looked at him and faltered.

"The poor dear deceived me about you, I suppose," she murmured.

"Come," said John, "give me some more money."

"It's such a wicked waste!" wailed Mrs. Coldershaw. "I never heard of such a thing."

"Give me some money."

"Will five pounds do for now?"

"All right."

She went upstairs and brought down a banknote for five pounds and gave it to him.

"Don't waste it," she said. "And be home early."

He did not answer her. He stuffed the note into his pocket and walked out. She followed him into the hall to brush his coat and wind his comforter about his neck, imploring him all the time not to go out, but to stay at home. He disregarded her.

"Kiss me," she said, as he put his hand upon the latch.

He did not seem to hear. She stood upon the doorstep watching his erratic progress down the street. The dignity was gone out of him; he walked heavily and clumsily, lurching at passers-by and stumbling at kerbs like a drunken man. At last he turned the corner.

She went back to her fireside, wishing she had offered to accompany him.

"My poor boy!" she murmured. "My poor boy!"

The hours passed and he did not return. It drew near to midnight. She became anxious, and watched for him at the window. But there her outlook was too circumscribed; she threw a shawl over her head and went to the door.

It was a fine starlit night. The streets were flooded with moonlight. A brisk wind was blowing, and the gas-jets jumped eerily. Most of the inhabitants of the street had gone to rest long ago, for it was a sedate neighbourhood; the lower stories of the houses were shuttered and dark; in an upper room, here and there, a light burned, showing through the window like a jaundiced eye. Mrs. Coldershaw shivered with cold and dread. It was so lonely out there, in the deserted street. To be awake at such an hour seemed almost a sin. She gazed wistfully at each belated wayfarer as he approached, praying that this might be her son at last. A policeman appeared at the corner. He stood still for some minutes, looming large and clear in the moonlight, with his shadow stretching behind him along the grey pavement. Presently he came toward her, walking slowly and stiffly. He looked at her as she passed the door, and gave her a civil:

"Good-night."

"Good-night," she said. Her voice rang hoarsely.

"Husband later than usual?" said the policeman.

"No, it's my son," she replied.

"Young rascal! Go in, mother, and get to bed. You won't do any good out here, you'll only ketch a cold, that's all."

He moved on.

"Good-night," he called out over his shoulder.

"Good-night," she said, again.

She was sorry when he disappeared. He had been a relief from the loneliness and the dread that were overpowering her.

"O, Jack, Jack!" she murmured.

At last, she could stand there no longer; she seemed chilled to the very heart. She went inside again and replenished the fire.

The clocks struck one—at intervals of ten seconds—for nearly five minutes. It was terribly still when the last dissentient bell had sounded. Mrs. Coldershaw said her prayers to keep from shrieking out aloud.

She prayed for nearly an hour; then she went to the door again and waited there while the clocks struck two.

Returning again to her fireside, she picked up a Bible that lay on the table, and set herself to reading it. Very soon she fell asleep.

The night slipped away, and still she slept. The maid came down yawning, and threw open the windows and the door to the drab dawn. The noise she made awoke Mrs. Coldershaw. She sprang up and, running to the door, accosted the astonished servant.

"Ain't he come home yet?" she asked.

"Who, 'm?" asked the girl, rubbing her pert nose.

"My son."

"Bless me, 'ow should *I* know, 'm. You was up last," said the girl.

"It's the morning now. He has bin out all night."

"Yes 'm."

"He's dead."

"Let's 'ope not, 'm."

"Don't talk to me!" cried Mrs. Coldershaw, fiercely. "Get out of my sight."

"Yes 'm," said the girl.

The street-door stood open. At that moment John

Coldershaw appeared on the threshold. He stood, with lowering brow, vacantly regarding the two women, his head sunken in his shoulders and thrust forward, his arms dangling loosely. There was that in his face which caused the mean little servant-maid to cry out in sudden horror.

"What's the matter?" he asked, smiling. His voice was low and hollow, and when he had spoken he let his lower lip hang slack, so that his broken red gums were revealed.

"I'm frightened," cried the maid. "Mrs. Coldershaw, don't let him touch me."

He turned to his mother; even she shrank from him.

"What's the matter?" he said again, in the same toneless voice.

She looked at him and answered:

"*God have mercy upon us!*"

He slunk past her. As he went up the stairs he kept his vacant, smiling face half turned toward them.

CHAPTER XXXIX

JOHN COLDERSHAW went up to his room and threw himself yawning upon the bed, not troubling to divest himself even of his boots. Very shortly his mother brought him some food, but he resisted her efforts to arouse him.

"Go away," he said, thickly.

She went away at last, leaving the food on a tray beside his bed. He rolled over as the door clicked behind her, and disposed himself for sleep again.

He slept till nightfall. Then he arose, devoured the food —cold and tasteless as it was—and sponged his face and hands. The clock struck eight as he finished his perfunctory ablutions.

He crept softly downstairs, reached for his hat, and passed into the street.

His mother was lying on a sofa in a room on the ground floor. She heard the door shut and ran out into the hall, crying:

"Jack, Jack!"

Her voice rang through the house; but there came no reply other than a faint echo of his name. She cried out again:

"Jack, Jack!"

Then, receiving no answer, she went from room to room looking for him with tear-blinded eyes.

As before, he did not return till the following morning, slinking in as the maid opened the door like a dishonourable watch-dog. This time he did not see his mother. She had sat up till the dawn, awaiting him; then, overpowered by want of rest, had yielded to her weariness and crept up to her bed, stiff and sore, and gone to sleep.

She awoke about midday, and having dressed herself, went at once to his room.

He was lying flat on his back, his arms thrown wide above his head. He wore all his clothes; the counterpane

was stained with the muddy imprint of his boots. His face was sallow and dirty ; he had not shaved for three days or passed a comb through his long hair ; one hand, lying exposed on the white pillow, was black with grime.

"O that he should come to this !" murmured the mother, gazing on him sadly. "O, my poor, wretched boy !—that he should come to this !"

He heard the rustle of her gown and opened his eyes.

"Hullo !" he said thickly, not moving. "What is it ?"

"I came to see if you were all right," faltered his mother.

He sucked his dry lips.

"I'm all right," he said, sullenly.

"Why don't you take your clo'es off ? You'll rest much better."

"It's such a trouble to put them on again," he answered. "And it doesn't matter."

"Have you had anything to eat yet ?"

"No. I should like something."

"The gel is getting dinner ready. Come down."

They ate the heavy midday meal together.

"Mother," said John, "I want some more money."

Mrs. Coldershaw dropped her knife and fork and stared at him.

"More money !" she cried.

He nodded calmly.

"But—but I gave you six pounds two days ago."

"I don't care. I want some more."

She knew not what to answer. She remembered his threat to go away and not come back if she refused him money. The burden of four lonely years was on her—the burden of four loveless, melancholy years ; she could not bear to contemplate a reversion to that sick state of being.

"O, don't ask me," she cried, "don't ask me for any more money. It won't do you good. You can't really want it."

"I do want it," he said. "And I must have it." He altered his tone. "Give me some, do," he whined.

"Will you promise not to go out at night if I give it you ?"

He shook his head. He seemed to be smitten with a sense of dull shame. He averted his gaze and plucked at the table-cloth with his dirty fingers.

"Then I sha'n't give you a farthing," she said. And (it was her nature) having said it, she resolved it.

He looked up fearfully.

"Yes," he said, "give me some."

"No," she answered, with a hard compression of her thin lips.

He rose up quickly, overturning his chair.

"Then I hate you," he said, and went from the room, cursing her.

The maid came in to clear the table. Mrs. Coldershaw retired to a corner and sat down.

"If you please, 'm," said the maid, timidly, "I wish to give notice, 'm."

"Eh?" cried her mistress, starting from abstraction deep and gloomy. "What for?"

"If you please, 'm, I'm frightened of Mr. John, 'm."

"Nonsense, girl! He won't hurt you."

"I'm frightened of him, 'm."

"O, well, go if you want to."

The girl pursued her duties for some minutes, glancing nervously at Mrs. Coldershaw from time to time.

"If you please, 'm," she said at last, speaking in a whisper, "if you please, 'm, I'd like to go at once."

"At once?"

"To-day, 'm, or to-morrow."

"You can't do that. It would be so inconvenient for me."

"If you please, 'm, I *shall* go. I *can't* stop here."

Mrs. Coldershaw reflected awhile.

"Very well," she said, "you may go."

"Thank you, 'm," the maid answered, fetching a great sigh.

She went upstairs and packed her trunks. When she had packed them she came down into the scarlet parlour, looking for Mrs. Coldershaw. John was lying on a sofa there.

"O, I beg your pardon, sir," she said.

He sprang up and interposed himself between her and the door. She grew pale with fear.

"Ha, ha, my little one, so I've caught you at last, have I!" he said, leering horribly.

"Let me go, sir," panted the girl.

"No, no. Damn it all my dear—no!"

He advanced toward her. She retreated, screaming shrilly. He seized her round the waist and struggled with her for a kiss.

"What is this? What is this?" cried Mrs. Coldershaw, appearing suddenly in the doorway.

John released the maid and sniggered, shamefacedly.

"I was only having a lark with her," he mumbled.

His mother held open the door and he passed out quickly. The girl sat down and wept.

"Don't cry," said Mrs. Coldershaw; "he hasn't hurt you."

"It wasn't his fault, 'm," said the girl. "O, 'm, he ought to be put away."

"Sh—sh!" cried Mrs. Coldershaw.

The girl stared.

"Don't say a word to anyone about him, dear," pleaded Mrs. Coldershaw, smiling suavely, but anxiously, too. "They might take him away from me, which I don't want."

"All right, 'm, *I* won't say nothing," the girl replied.

Mrs. Coldershaw gave her a sovereign in addition to her wages, and the girl departed, well-pleased.

John went out that night as usual, cunningly eluding his mother's vigilance. As on the two former occasions he did not return until the morning. And every night he repeated his practice.

His mother was powerless to prevent his nocturnal ramblings. In vain, she pleaded and reasoned with him; he turned a deaf ear to her entreaties. She had hoped that lack of money would keep him at home; but herein she had reckoned ill: he fell upon the simple expedient of pawning his more valuable belongings, and thus supplied himself with the money she denied him. She foresaw that in course of time he must exhaust his store of valuables—his rings, pins, books, clothing, china, *et cetera*; but that would be long hence. She was at her wits' ends to know what to do. If only she could have brought herself to give up all hope of his ultimate redemption she might have yielded him to the Lunacy Commissioners and learnt resignation from the inevitable. But there were times when he seemed sane as ever; he had soft moods in which he would listen to her solicitations and even be moved to tearful promises of amendment. Occasionally he would not go out at

all, but sit with her over the fire, talking rationally and quietly, or listening meekly to her words.

He grew terribly careless of his person. He hated to undress and rarely did so; his face was seldom clean, his hands always dirty; he allowed his hair and beard to grow untouched.

The summer came, with its long tale of hot, heavy days and unresting nights. Mrs. Coldershaw had not cared to engage a new maid in place of the old one, but hired a charwoman to come in three times a week to do the heavier housework; the cooking and the lighter toil she did herself. She attended the Mission Hall services regularly as of old: they coloured her existence. John's room was by this time quite denuded of superfluities; his mother was awaiting the end of his resources in this direction with considerable anxiety.

On a dull, close evening in July he sallied forth as usual at the fall of night and went his erratic way down the street, followed by many curious eyes at the house-windows. He walked eastward for two hours, stepping slowly and painfully, as was now his wont; the perspiration shone on his face as he went—he did not trouble to wipe it away. At last he came into a squalid suburb on the far riverside.

The night was very black. There were no stars, no moon. The doors of the houses stood open to entrap the feeble wind.

He was passing under a railway-arch when a woman accosted him. They walked together for a hundred yards, talking in whispers. They were under a gas-lamp when John Coldershaw recognised in the woman an old acquaintance.

"Why, it's Alice!" he said.

"Eh?" the woman asked.

"Aren't you Alice Shallers?"

"I'm what's left of her, my dear. Who are you?"

"Guess."

"God! How can I? There's been so many."

He laughed.

"Hi! hold up!" she said. "Let's 'ave a look at yer."

But his head drooped lower.

"I can't see nothink of you under that damned great 'at," she said.

She snatched at the hat as she spoke. He knocked up her arm with his elbow.

"I'm Jack Coldershaw," he said.

"*You!* No fear!"

"I am."

An inflexion of his voice assured her that he spoke truth.

"Good God!" she said. "Fancy us meeting like this. What the 'ell d'you want to wear that horrid great beard for? What wi' that an' the 'at I can't see nothink of yer face! . . . . 'Ow 'ave yer bin getting on?"

"O, all right. How have you been getting on?"

"All wrong, my love. But I've 'ad my fling, so I don't care."

They walked along in silence.

"Well," she said; "I s'pose you'll treat me for the sake of old times, won't you."

"I'd rather not," he answered, doubtfully.

"Not a glass o' beer even? What's the matter? Down on your luck."

"No," he said. "But I don't care to go into a public-house."

"Got religion?" she asked him.

"It isn't that."

"Turned teetote?"

"No. I don't care about it, that's all."

"Will you 'ave a glass wi' me at home?"

"Yes," he said, eagerly. "I should like that."

"All right, come along. "It ain't much of a place, though, mindjer."

"That doesn't matter," he said.

She peeped under his hat, laughing; but the street was dark; she could see no more than the vague outline of his face above his big, unkempt beard. He laughed, too, but nervously. They went along, side by side, through numberless small alleys.

At last Alice Shallers halted at the open door of a high, black house at the corner of a long street, running parallel to a railway.

"Here we are!" she said. "Come in."

There was a group of women in the narrow passage, visible through the open doorway. John put a trembling hand on her arm.

"Who are those?" he whispered.

"That's all right; they won't say nothing," said Alice. "I live here."

She gave the women "Good-evening." They responded civilly enough and made way for her. She passed between a double row of them, John following closely on her heels.

"That's a rough-lookin' customer," said one of the women to another, as the pair disappeared down the stairs. "Gawd save us! He gimme the creeps!"

"I live in the front kitching," said Alice, giving John her hand. "Be careful 'ow you break your neck. Strike a match, if you've got one."

"I haven't," he said.

They descended cautiously to a foul-smelling passage. There was a noise of scurrying vermin. In a room close at hand a woman was shrieking at a drunken lover, and beating his prostrate body with her hand. The sound of her thumping punctuated her jeremiad. The man was either dead or senseless; for he made no protest. All this was clearly audible in the evil darkness.

Alice still retained her hold on John's hand.

"This way," she said.

She pushed open a door—he heard it creak on its stiff hinges, and relinquished her clutch to grope about the room in which they were now standing together. At last she struck a match and set it to a candle. The wax spluttered and a smoky flame, slowly growing, threw a sickly light over the room.

In the centre of the floor was a table; in a corner was a little, dirty bed on an iron bedstead. There were a few chairs and boxes scattered through the apartment, and a high, varnished cupboard on either side of the fireplace.

"Sit down and take off your things," said Alice, going to the cupboard as she spoke.

He slowly removed his coat and allowed it to slip to the floor. She came back from the cupboard bearing a bottle and two glasses.

"Gin," she said. "Will that do?"

"That will do," he answered.

"Take off that horrible great hat," she said. "I want to have a look at yer."

"No," he said.

"Why not?"

"I'd rather keep it on."

"What's the idea?"

He did not reply this time, but sat down at the table. She poured out two glasses of gin and handed one to him.

"Here's luck!" she said, and tossed it down her throat.

The light of the candle shone upward on her face. It was thin and white; her high cheek-bones were visible from her ear forward. Her eyes moved loosely in their hollow sockets. Her dress was stained and torn; she wore a light bodice, soiled and darned; and gloves. There was a great bunch of dingy flowers pinned on the hollow bosom of her dress.

Having finished her gin, she came over to John Coldershaw and put her arm about his neck.

"'Ow long your 'air is, now!" she said.

As she spoke she plucked off his hat and flung it away. He rose slowly and confronted her.

In the adjoining room the shrieking and thumping continued, unabated.

Alice Shallers looked at John. He was wet with perspiration, and unclean; his agitation caused his scars to burn redly.

"Well?" he said.

"It can't be you," Alice muttered. "It can't be!"

He stood with fumbling hands, his mouth twitching under his ragged beard. She moved away from him.

"What's the matter?" he asked, scowling.

"Keep away!" she said, shrilly.

There was a moment of stillness and silence. He advanced a pace.

"Keep away, I tell you!" she said again. "I can't bear the look of you. Get out of it!"

He was between her and the door.

"Don't go on at me like that," he said.

She shuddered.

"Go away," she cried. "It makes me sick to look at you. You ain't like a man."

He responded, sullenly, "I sha'n't go away."

"Whose place is this, mine or yours?" she cried.

"I don't care whose place it is," he said. "I'm not going away." He advanced toward her again. "Let me stop," he said. He thrust his hand into his pocket.

"No," she said. "I wouldn't have you near me—not for ten quid down. . . . Get out of it!"

"I sha'n't."

"I'll soon git someone to chuck you out," she said, and began to cry out loudly: "'Arry! . . . . Bill!" But the uproar in the adjoining room drowned her voice.

Her loud outcry filled John Coldershaw with ready fear.

"Leave off!" he exclaimed.

She still continued to call out: "'Arry! . . . Bill!" not heeding him.

Suddenly he swept the candle from the table with a stroke of his arm, and sprang at her in the darkness.

CHAPTER XL

THE hour was one o'clock. There was a hooting and humming of horns, a shrieking of steam-whistles, and the discordant clanging of bells. From yard and workshop hungry labourers, with aprons looped about their waists, poured into the hot streets. The city panted and sweated in the intense heat—a distressed monster; above, the sun shone in the blue like an inflamed eye.

A hoarse, damp newsboy, barefooted, bareheaded, ran through the lower reaches of the City, screaming:

"Horrible murder! Piper!"

Two men were turning into the side-bar of a little inn that stands on the riverside at a point where London throws out an iron arm to the Surrey shore. They paused as the newsboy sped past, and one said to the other:

"Read about it?"

"No," answered his mate.

"O, horrible affair! Awful!"

They were now at the bar.

"Two 'alves o' old six, missie, please," said the first speaker. "Yus, horrible affair it is! . . . . Well, 'ere's luck."

They took their beer to a table and sat down and filled their pipes.

"Tell us about it," said the ill-informed of the twain.

"I was jest goin' to," the other replied. "It's a woman that's killed—one o' them there pore unfortunates. The whole thing happened down Lime'us way—or was it Rotherhithe? I forget. Anyhow it appears that last night this 'ere woman brought a man home with her. She lived in the front-kitching. They went down together—lots o' the other people in the 'ouse see 'em, an' nothink more was 'eard for about two hours. Then the man come up and went away. There was some pipple laying about in the passidge for coolness, and he had to pick his way

among 'em. They let 'im go. This mornin' a pal of this 'ere Alice Shallerses—that's the name o' the woman who's bin murdered—goes into her room to 'ave a chow, an' finds the poor thing dead!"

At the word "dead" a frowsy stranger in a dim corner looked up suddenly.

"Dead! Ah, dead as your 'at!" the speaker continued. "There wasn't no marks o' blood. She was strangled. Her tongue was stickin' out blue and swollen. She was frightfully bruised, and there was a mark o' teeth in her cheek. The man had bitten her in the struggle. But that ain't the wust on it. After the pore thing was done for the brute amused himself by cracking her fingers and gouging her eyes out, and so on. . . . Horrible, I call it!"

"Didn't they 'ear no noise?"

"What! in a neighbourhood like that! 'Tain't likely they'd take any notice if they did. Rows is too common down their way . . . . a lot o' blooming 'eathens!"

"'Ave they copped the man yet?"

"Not yut. But the police is on his track. He left a coat behind him—that's a clue."

"What a fool!"

"O, I expect it's some rotten madman, y'know."

"Ah! . . . 'Ave another?"

"No, let's mouch fust."

They left the inn. The frowsy stranger who had started at the word "dead" now rose and went out, also. He did not follow in the footsteps of the other two men but struck out a direction for himself. He walked as one who is tired, slowly, painfully, with bent head. He followed an eccentric route; it would have seemed that he walked aimlessly but for his dogged steadiness of pace and the persistent predilection that he showed for the more secluded thoroughfares.

By means of many obscure byways where high, formless warehouses reared their walls to the brassy sky, he came at last upon a bridge spanning the Thames. He walked halfway to the further side and then sat down on a stone bench and twisted his face over the broad masonry and looked down at the river. It was an ugly, uncomfortable posture, but he maintained it for a great time. Passers on the narrow pavement gazed idly at him, but they could not see his face, only a bunch of greasy hair

under a wide-brimmed hat. The sun was shining on the brown water, drawing a hard glitter from its rugged surface. There were barges loading from the south bank and barges in slow progression; dingy tugs, belching forth fire and smoke, puffed their jerky way up and down stream; at longer intervals, red-banded steamers touched at a floating pier, churning the river into froth, ere departing toward the sea along a path of boiling snow. But the frowsy stranger seemed not to heed what was passing under his eyes; he did not once move his head or shift his attitude until he quitted the seat altogether and passed on, southward.

His desultory wanderings lasted throughout the afternoon. Evening found him plodding wearily across the downs near Wimbledon. There were few people abroad. Now and then, a pair of absorbed lovers hove in sight, head to head, and moved slowly over the scape, or a labourer trudged heavily adown the wide, white road. The sun sank in an amber spray of clouds and the moon rose. Still, the frowzy stranger held his dogged course.

At the fall of night he happened on a tiny inn, six furlongs away from any other house. He had fallen lame, and a glimpse that he caught through an open window of men drinking at their ease from deep, glittering pots, tempted him to break his journey here. He stopped, irresolute, his elbow propped on the fence surrounding the inn. Then he dragged his great hat more forward over his eyes and passed under the embowered porch into the bar.

At his entry there was a momentary lull of conversation and everybody turned to regard him. He went nervously to the counter and ordered sixpennyworth of brandy and "one of those" pointing to a pile of mutton pasties heaped on a dish. He retired with his fare to a corner and despatched it quickly.

His companions in the bar were habitués of the place; that was evident from their easy manners and the confidential nature of their talk. They were mostly men of a humble class, with an inclination to be harmlessly noisy and dogmatic over their pipes and beer. But soon there entered a man of a different calibre—a lively, voluble bagman, travelling with liqueurs.

"Evening, gentlemen," said he to the assembled company.

"Fine day, sir," ventured the landlady.

"Fine weather doesn't make a fine day, ma'am," said the bagman. "It's all very well for you people out here where there's a chance of fresh air; but you climb the everlasting treadmill of City stairs for eight hours on end —you wouldn't talk about fine weather, then."

"P'r'aps not, p'r'aps not," the landlady said.

"And then there's another thing," said the loquacious bagman. "How about the poor folk in the bad neighbourhoods? What d'you think happens to them on days like this?"

"Lord, how can *I* tell?"

"*Fleas* happens to 'em, ma'am!"

"God save us! Ugh!"

"And cholery, ma'am, and fever and anything else tropical and bad as you can name."

"Tut, tut!"

"*Murder* happens to 'em, ma'am. It always breaks out in the hot weather. And who can wonder? Poor devils, they're all half-mad with the heat and the stinks and the thirst and the bad beer——"

"Poor things, poor things!"

"You've heard about this last affair."

"Mister Rimes has been a-telling of me. Terrible, terrible!"

"Ah, ah! Terrible, indeed! As I say, the devil has a good time in the summer. What chance does he get when there's a couple of inches of snow on the ground, or a wind about as you could cut glass with? None at all, bless you. Men ain't got time to hang around thinking sin with a backbone of ice. Not they! It's the heat brings the original wickedness out of us. Abolish summer, *I* say, and the devil will die of inanition!"

"Lord, how you talk! . . . I suppose there ain't much of a chance of 'em catching the murderer. They never seem to be able to now, these police."

"They will this time. He was seen by so many, you see. His description's out already. He must be a rare beauty by all accounts. . . . And then he left his coat behind him."

"What's he like?" asked the landlady.

"Don't ask me," said the bagman. "Anyhow, for a start, his face is one mass of great, red scars."

The frowzy stranger brushed roughly past the bagman on his way out.

"Good-night, sir," said the landlady, curtly.

He did not reply.

"Now *that's* a mysterious-looking man, if you like," the landlady said. "For all we know he might as lief as not be the——"

"The devil himself?"

"No, the murderer."

"Come to that, so might I. *You* don't know."

The frowzy stranger stumbled over the steps, crossed the yard, swung to the wooden gate, and emerged in the road again.

"Damn him!" he said. "Why couldn't he keep quiet? They all talk about it."

He laughed and his voice rang over the level heath, uncannily. An echo came back to him across a ragged patch of water. He shivered and broke into a limping trot.

It was now as dark as it would be. North, the sky was silver-tinted with the sun's trail, a broken mass of cloud was sailing up from the west. There were gleams of phosphorescence in the lower-lying gloom of the trees' shade. A wanton wind blew gustily, driving the hot, rank air. The clouds gathered fast. Soon the sky, from horizon to zenith, was quite obscured. The trees swayed in the freshening breeze. There was a liquid rush of rain, and a veil of fire descending rent the darkness asunder. A hollow, distant growl, swelling on the wind, rolled up from the stormy west.

The frowsy stranger felt the warm spatter of water on his hands; he saw the lightning; and heard, afar-off, the faint sounds of approaching thunder. He was full of fear and cried out inarticulately, as cry out the wild beasts that perish. He threw his hands abroad to the sky, and stood motionless, cowering down close to the parched earth. The tempest broke over him again and he leapt upward, striking at the rain with a presumptuous hand. The lightning revealed his face, scored with lines that the sudden irradiation made black. He cried out again.

He turned and struggled up the bank that bounded the road on his right, digging his hands into the grey, powdery earth, clutching the brittle grass, tearing his flesh on

dead brier-branches. He gained the level heath and started to run.

Again the lightning played over the scape, etching the silhouette of each nodding tree in running silver-line; the thunder crashed and crackled. There was an interval of darkness and stillness; it was as if a million lions lay crouching in the grass—the ebbing wind might have been the soughing of their breath. Then the rain pattered on the leaves and the dust smoked. An evanescent blue gleam showed the world all barred with water.

The frowsy stranger put his fingers to his eyes and ran on with lowered head, till, striking a bluff of sandstone with a precipitous further side, he crashed through half a score of bushes, growing horizontally, and rolled down the steep into a pestiferous ditch. There he lay groaning until the storm was ended.

CHAPTER XLI

THE dawn was fair after the tempest. The sun rolled up from the east, broad and genial of face, showering largess on the world. With magnificent carelessness it threw a morsel of gold to Mrs. Coldershaw, sitting in her bedroom, sleeping with her head bowed on her knees. In her dreams she heard a knocking at the door of her house, and started up in answer ere her senses were awake.

She went down and drew the latch. A band of light streamed in, falling athwart her; and in the light she saw her son standing. At sight of her he babbled and laughed and put forth his hands. She caught them and he fell in her arms and was still.

She shut the door quickly, and carried him up to his room and stripped off his wet garments and laid him in his bed. The feat exhausted her, and she sat down, wondering at its accomplishment. Having covered him up she ran out into the streets, and roused up a sleepy doctor and brought him back with her.

John Coldershaw lay with his burning head rolling on the pillow, his eyes distended and red, his toothless mouth agape. He was laughing and singing and shouting. At the doctor's entry he sat up and waved a lean arm, trolling out:

> "I oft asked for holiday—
> Ole massa shake him head;
> He tell me dat I am gettin' lazy."

"Hush, dear!" cried Mrs. Coldershaw. He paused and looked at her, laughing; then continued his song:

> "But my heart is gone—
> Yes, away it am fled
> To my own, O my darling little Daisy!"

"We'll have the chorus the second time, please. Spread yourselves on the 'O,' gentlemen."

"He used to sing that song ten years ago," said weeping Mrs. Coldershaw to the doctor.

"So day and night
Where'er I roam,
Her bright form haunts me still,
Dancing like the moonbeams' shimmer
On a summer rill.
O, darling Daisy!
It is of thee I dream."

The doctor soothed him into silence.

"What has he been doing?" he asked Mrs. Coldershaw.

"He's been out for two nights and a day, sir," she answered. "I don't know."

"Um—um," murmured the doctor, nodding his head with professional gravity. He rose, having made the usual examination of his patient. "You must keep him warm and quiet," he said. "I'll send round a bottle of something in an hour." He added a few other directions and departed.

John Coldershaw rolled over and fell asleep. His mother watched beside him for an hour; then she descended to the kitchen and prepared a dainty dish wherewith to tempt his appetite on his awaking. She was engaged among the pots and pans when she heard footsteps on the stairs and the sound of singing. She ran out and encountered her son in the little hall. He was reeling on the floor-cloth in a vain effort to dance, his scanty white shirt caught in the draught from the door, blowing about his thin legs. She led him back to his room (he suffered her meekly enough) and put him to bed again. She held his hand and endeavoured to lull him to sleep.

"Mother," he said, suddenly, "why doesn't she come?"

"Who, dear?"

"Eva—my wife. She knows I am ill, doesn't she; or did I dream it?"

"You don't want her."

"I do. She could nurse me."

"I can nurse you," said the jealous mother.

"But she could make me well again. Get her to come, mother. Go and fetch her."

"I will, dear," his mother said to pacify him.

He smiled, and closed his eyes. Presently, he opened them again.

"Will she be here when I wake up?" he asked.

"Yes—p'r'aps."

"No, no! Will she?"

"Yes, yes, yes."

At that he fell asleep.

In the afternoon, the doctor called again. Mrs. Coldershaw told him of what had passed.

"Try and get his wife to come by all means," the doctor said. "For many reasons it would be advisable. In the first place, I must tell you that it is unlikely he will recover——"

"No, no, no, no!"

The doctor faltered, rubbing his chin.

"He *may*, of course. He is young and there are the remains of a good constitution in him. But . . . . However, we'll look at the bright side. . . . . In the second place it is always as well to gratify an invalid's whims if you can. In this case——Do you think she will come? I gather there is some—er—unfortunate disagreement."

"Ye—es."

"Are you favourable to her coming?"

"I don't want her to come; but if you think it'll do my poor boy any good I'm willing."

"I think she had better be asked to come, as he desires it."

"Yes, sir."

"You'd better not leave him alone. Can you get a neighbour to come in and sit with him?"

"I'll try, sir."

"Or telegraph, if you like."

"He wrote to her before, sir, and she never come."

"Ah, he wasn't ill, then. Come, write out a telegram and I'll send it for you. Just '*Your husband is very dangerously ill and wishes to see you at once.*"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you a form?"

"No, sir."

"Never mind. Do it on this half-sheet."

"I—I can't write much, sir."

"O! I'll do it for you."

He went away.

The garish day faded into evening. The sun, setting in a blue-grey haze, blazed on the upper windows of the

houses, flooding the streets with a reflected glory. The voices of children rose to the sick-chamber; foolish voices, oftener splenetic than playful.

The sick man lay in a state between sleeping and delirium. There was a great fire in the room, and a kettle poured out steam, moistening the sweet, heavy air. Sometimes he cried out aloud or sang or raised his voice in eldritch laughter, and his mother would have to speak to him and soothe him. He accepted her ministrations peevishly, shaking off her hand and cursing her.

"I want Eva," he would say. "Where's Eva?"

And his mother would be choked with bitter tears.

Eva came at last. It was dark when her knock sounded on the street-door. Mrs. Coldershaw admitted her. She looked at the straight, dainty figure outlined against the grey street, and asked:

"Are you my son's wife?"

Eva answered agitatedly: "You are his mother?" and proffered her hand.

Mrs. Coldershaw did not take it.

"I could not come before," said Eva, timidly; "because the telegram was sent to my old address and had to be forwarded by hand. I am living in Conduit Street now, not Bloomsbury."

"Come in," said Mrs. Coldershaw, abruptly.

Eva entered the house.

"Is he very ill?" she asked.

The mother's face quivered in answer.

"Dear Mrs. Coldershaw, I am so sorry," said Eva. "O, believe I am so sorry."

Mrs. Coldershaw merely rejoined:

"Come upstairs. He's bin asking for you all day."

They ascended to the sick-chamber.

"Is that Eva?" John Coldershaw cried out, as the door opened.

Eva turned to the bed. At sight of her husband she stopped.

"Who is that?" she whispered.

"Come and sit down here—near me," said the sick man. "Mother, you go away. We don't want you any more."

"No, no," Eva said, hoarsely to Mrs. Coldershaw. "Don't go away. I won't be left alone with him. He—he is so altered."

The mother, with white lips quivering, stood away from the bed, a proud, pathetic figure.

"Yes," she said, "I'll go."

"*Don't* go," said Eva. "At least, not yet."

She put her hand on Mrs. Coldershaw's arm.

"Yes," said the mother, speaking slowly and steadily. "I'll go."

But she lingered, notwithstanding.

"Eva, Eva!" cried John Coldershaw. "Come over here. Why do you stand away like that? Come and talk to me."

Eva approached the bed slowly.

"You won't go away any more?" said the sick man, eagerly.

"No."

He raised himself on his elbow, painfully, and advanced his face toward her. In despite, she drew back her head. Mrs. Coldershaw moved towards the door. Eva rose swiftly and intercepted her.

"Will he . . . . will he recover?" she whispered.

"I pray God he may."

"What does the doctor think?"

"He—doesn't—think—he—will . . . . O—O—O!"

Mrs. Coldershaw bowed her face in her hands and sobbed in the shadow of the bed.

"S-sh!" murmured Eva. "You will disturb him."

She would have offered a word of sympathy, but the mother's manner repelled her.

"Stay here," she whispered. "Do—please—Mrs. Coldershaw.

"No," said Mrs. Coldershaw, with bitter obstinacy. "I'm not wanted."

"You are tired out with nursing him. I can see that. Perhaps it will be better. I can watch. I have left word at home that I may be absent some time. They will send a few things on. Let me persuade you to lie down. He will be safe with me."

Eva spoke very gently, with wistful eyes. Mrs. Coldershaw did not soften. She went out, hard, stern, full of jealous rage and enmity.

"Eva, Eva," said the impatient voice from the bed.

She conquered her aversion and sat down beside him.

"That's it," he said. "Give me your hand."

She gave him her hand and he fondled it. He tucked it in his breast and closed his eyes.

Eva began to mingle pity with her disgust. She remembered what this man had been; she set him up in that room in all the vigorous pride and beauty of his youth, and looked from the fair phantom of her creation to the living shattered reality on the bed. And her heart surged in her. . . . .

He had fallen asleep. His grasp on her fingers relaxed, but she did not withdraw her hand. She sat watching him for an hour.

Then Mrs. Coldershaw re-entered the room.

"His physic," she said. "He ought to take it now. Once every three hours it is."

"But he is asleep," said Eva. "It can't be worth while to wake him."

Mrs. Coldershaw lowered her eyelids.

"Do as you like," she said, sullenly. "I sha'n't interfere again."

Eva wished to expostulate, but she could not in that sick-chamber, without disturbing the invalid.

The night passed. In the morning the doctor came. He recognised in Eva an acquaintance.

"Tell me the truth about my husband," said Eva.

"It is just possible he may recover. The case is primarily one of nervous exhaustion, but there is fever, too, and . . . . The great thing is to induce perspiration. Above all things, he must be kept warm and quiet. Any sudden chill, however slight in itself, would be fatal." He went to the bed. "Um-um! He has not improved in the night. Are you a nervous woman? But I can see you are not."

"No."

"Because he is likely to be very delirious to-day. You must keep him in bed. You won't need to use force. He'll be docile enough, but noisy."

"I am not afraid," Eva said.

Mrs. Coldershaw appeared in the doorway. Her eyes were red and her cheeks were grey with weeping.

"Come, come, ma'am," said the doctor; "this won't do. We shall be having you ill next."

Mrs. Coldershaw's face contracted in a weak smile.

"No," she said. She put her hand to her head. "How is he?" she asked.

"O, not much different," replied the doctor. He took her by the arm. "You go and lie down," he said; "and don't worry. Your daughter-in-law is an excellent nurse, naturally so; if anybody can pull your son through, she can. Leave him to her."

Mrs. Coldershaw said, softly, "Yes, sir," and turned away. She spoke no word to Eva, but walked back to her room and locked the door. She came down again to the sick-chamber, however, in a few minutes, and beckoned Eva outside.

"The doctor says you are the best nurse of us two," she said; "so you can nurse him. I only want him to get better. And I'm quite willing to help you if you want anything done that I can do—" she paused—"for his sake," she added. Eva would have spoken, but Mrs. Coldershaw checked her. "If I can fetch anything or cook anything, I will," she said. "You yourself must eat, of course. And there's other things."

"It is very kind of you," Eva said.

"It ain't any kindness to you I'm intendin'," said the mother, harshly. "So don't think it."

"You wouldn't say that if you were yourself, Mrs. Coldershaw."

"Ah, wouldn't I?" She laughed. "But I would," she said. "I say, Rot you, but save my poor boy! I'm all at odds with myself, or I could do it without you."

She shook her head and crept away. She brought Eva food in a few minutes, and Eva ate it gratefully, for she was sick and faint with hunger.

About midday there was an alteration in John's condition. The veins on his face stood out, swollen and purple; he rolled and tossed, shouting, singing, laughing. . . . . He laid bare all his heart—every evil thought and memory . . . . Eva heard with shrinking ears. At last she felt she could no longer endure to listen to the lurid obscenities frothing from his lips. She arose.

"Stop!" she cried, hoarsely, adjuring the senseless thing upon the bed.

He was silent for a brief space, awakened to semi-consciousness by her voice. Then he started to talk again. She would have covered his mouth with her hands and stifled speech in him for ever; but his hideous face, flecked with foam, red with fever, was too abhorrent to her senses.

She could not touch him. She sat down at the further end of the room and put up a screen between them.

His voice filled the room. She likened it to a foul flying devil beating his black wings about her ears. Sometimes he stopped, exhausted; sometimes he sang lewd rhymes or told loathly tales with careful circumstance . . . . Eva wept with vague shame to hear him. . . . .

The door of the room was opened.

"Get back!" cried Eva. "For the love of God, go away! Don't listen. You are his mother. . . . . You must not listen."

Mrs. Coldershaw stood trembling on the threshold. At the sound of Eva's voice the moral leper on the bed became silent, as before. Only his sterterous breathing was audible.

"Go away!" pleaded Eva. "Dear Mrs. Coldershaw, if you desire to love your son another minute—go away!"

But the mother did not seem to hear.

"Come downstairs," she said. "Quick. Come. I don't understand."

"What is down there?" Eva whispered, overcome with a new, vague horror. She drew back fearfully.

"Come, come," said Mrs. Coldershaw. "He will tell you."

"He? Who?"

"The man down there."

"Why must I know?"

"Oh, come, come. You must. What can *I* say to him?"

Eva delayed no longer, but followed Mrs. Coldershaw downstairs.

A man stood on the mat in the dim hall, a straight, stiff man, big-limbed, clean-shaven. He put his finger to his forehead at sight of the women.

"Good afternoon, ma'am," he said to Eva. "I'm a detective."

"Yes."

"You are Mrs.—John—Coldershaw."

"Yes."

"I—er—it's an awkward affair, and I—er—must apologize. I'm sorry. I have a warrant for your husband's arrest. But I hear he's ill."

"Yes, he is very ill," Eva said.

"I take your word for it, ma'am, with pleasure. Very

happy. But I must see the doctor. If you'll let me wait till he calls and he corroborates you I'll go away."

"You can wait—yes."

"I want to see if he's well enough to be removed to the prison infirmary. If he is, he'll have to go there, you know. Otherwise, I can put off arresting him for a bit."

John's mother stepped out from the shadow. "What's e' done?" she asked and dropped down fainting at Eva's feet. Eva knelt down beside her and lifted her up.

"We must get her into her room," she said. "She's going to be ill too, I'm afraid."

"Let me carry her, ma'am," said the detective. He followed Eva upstairs, bearing the inert form of Mrs. Coldershaw.

"Thank you," said Eva, turning to the man. "Wait downstairs in the parlour, will you, while I put her to bed? Then I'll come and talk to you. I want to ask you a few questions."

"Yes, ma'am."

The detective said of Eva, as he descended the stairs:

"That's a pretty cool one, on *my* word!"

Eva, having restored Mrs. Coldershaw to ungrateful consciousness of her misery and disposed her comfortably on the bed, went down to interview the detective. On her way she looked into the chamber where John Coldershaw lay. He seemed to be sleeping.

"What is the charge on which you wish to arrest Mr. Coldershaw?" Eva asked the detective.

His square, good-natured face grew grave. He hesitated a moment.

"Are you sure you really want to know?" he asked.

"Yes, I want to know," Eva said.

"It's a very grave charge. It's the gravest charge of all—murder!"

Eva did not speak. She sat down suddenly and looked at the man with unseeing eyes.

"Murder!" she repeated.

He nodded.

"Tell me about it," she said, impatiently. "Who has he killed? What did he do it for?"

"Perhaps he didn't do it at all, you know. It's only a suspicion as yet. I hope he didn't, ma'am—for your sake."

"Tell me," she said, beating on the gaudy carpet with her foot, "who was it he killed?"

"A woman."

"Of course—a woman."

"Her name was Alice Shallers, ma'am. She was an—er—unfortunate, ma'am. But perhaps you read about it?

"No, I don't read such things. Go on. When was it done? How was it done?"

"Oh, ma am!"

"Tell me."

She spoke imperiously. The man grew angry at having wasted so much consideration on such an unworthy wife.

"Very well, ma'am, as you wish it," he said, and gave her the story in detail, not sparing her. His even, strident voice and its awful burden blended oddly with other voices outside—the thin voices of children, and their simple utterances. The blind was drawn over the window and the room was in semi-darkness. The sun insinuated a thin beam of light at the edge of the blind; a myriad particles of glorified dust danced in it, and flies, darting to and fro, punctured the further gloom with points of silvery iridescence. Eva listened to the children's voices and looked at the sunshine and the flies and the furniture, dimly outlined, till every detail of sound and sight seemed burned indelibly into her brain. Yet, all the while, she had a free mind for the full comprehension of the detective's story.

When he had finished he began to add commentary from sheer morbid love of his subject; but Eva checked him. He lapsed into silence. The room above was the room in which John Coldershaw lay. Eva thought she caught at intervals a dim echo of his voice, raised in delirious ribaldry.

There was a knock at the door.

"That is the doctor," said Eva. "I will leave you with him." She went to the street-door and admitted the doctor.

"Ah, ha, and how is the patient?" he asked.

"This gentleman wants a word with you," Eva said, indicating the detective, who had followed her from the parlour. "You can come upstairs afterwards."

And she ascended slowly to the sick-chamber.

John Coldershaw was sleeping. She softly closed the door and crossed to the bed and regarded him. She

wondered that she could bear thus to soil her vision, but within her all sensation seemed suddenly dead. She felt that she could never love or hate any mortal thing again.

Presently the doctor came in. He went straight to the bed and examined his patient.

"This is an improvement," he said. "He may recover. The issue is still doubtful, of course, but there is a better chance than there was. The thing is still—to induce perspiration. If only we can bring that about we may pull him through." He stopped. Thus far he had been only a doctor, now he became a man as well. "I have sent the policeman away," he said, and added, "I hope—this—is not true."

Eva did not speak.

"It is very dreadful," he continued, somewhat puzzled by Eva's demeanour. "But you must not worry about it. He can't be guilty."

Still Eva did not answer. Finding his well-meant sympathy so ill-received he merged the man in the doctor again.

"Well," he said; "we can only wait. Keep up a big fire. Pile all the blankets in the house on him and be careful not to admit the shadow of a breath of wind into the room. Especially be careful if he should begin to perspire. A chill then would be as fatal as a knife in his heart. Are you reconciled to spending the night alone with him? I want you to get everything you require into this room; then, to lock the door, so that no one can enter at a critical moment and bring cold air in. I can trust you to do this, I know. But, if you like, I will send a trained nurse round in an hour. No? Very well. But you must be careful to prevent any interference on the part of the old lady, the mother. She is quite demoralized and would be no good at all; the reverse, in fact."

"Ah, that reminds me," said Eva. "She is ill too. She is in her room. She fainted."

"I'll see to her," the doctor said. He hesitated. "Is there anything you would like to ask me?" he murmured.

"No, thank you," Eva said.

"You understand. Keep him warm and——"

"Yes, yes," Eva broke in. "I understand."

He went out. Presently he came back.

"I have told the old lady not to move out of bed," he

said. "She will be all right. You won't want me till the morning. Good-night."

"Good-night," Eva responded; "and thank you."

When the doctor was gone she went out and found half a dozen blankets, after some searching, and brought them to the sick-chamber and spread them on the bed. She piled fresh coal on the fire, drew the blinds and curtains, and lighted the lamps. That done, she sat down and waited.

Her brain was very busy. Her thoughts seemed articulate; they spoke in voices that were like the tinkling of little bells in her ears. They said many things over and over again, with senseless, wearisome reiteration. Then there were dark intervals of murmurous silence, into which flashed, meteor-like, a voice which passed as a cry in the night passes, yet was more bodeful of truth than all the voices that had gone before.

The sick man slept away the hours, and the woman sat watching him and judging him.

It was almost dawn. Where the blue haze of day, stealing in from without, met the yellow glow of the lamps under the window, there was an odd, faint shimmer of green.

She went to the bed and put her finger on the sick man's brow. She had done this a hundred times previously during the night, and always had touched hot, dry flesh; now she drew her finger away, clammy with moisture. She stood for a moment irresolute; then took a lamp in her hand and held it over the sleeping man. It shone on a face wet with perspiration. The lamp shook in her grasp. She replaced it on the table and sat down, trembling. . . . .

She resolved that he must die and spite God's ordinance. . . . . She would be his executioner, self-appointed. . . . If he died his sins would be buried with him, and the finger of scorn would be averted from her children. . . . If he lived the whole foul story must be unfolded, that thing the true story, without hiatuses. . . . He must not live to hand down an heritage of shame to the guiltless. . . . There was no doubt of his guilt; he was red with guilt—a murderer of women's souls and a woman's body, self-

confessed to her. . . . If he lived it would be only for a little time. . . . He would go down to his death a spectacle for the execration of unborn generations—a hideous memory. . . . If he died his children would be spared a knowledge of their shame . . . . their shame which was no shame but God's, out of Whose Law it sprang.

There were other reasons that she could not remember now, for she was tired with much thinking. She had pondered the matter well; she had weighed chances; and she had resolved dispassionately. Before God, she held herself guiltless.

She drew up the blind. The light poured in, wan and pale with the burden of the night's unrest. She turned her eyes heavenward, where a few stars still burned in the glowing sky. Her fingers fumbled with the lock of the window. At last it sprang back with a loud metallic crack that seemed almost to split the air like thunder. Her limbs failed and she fell to the floor. Rising, she hesitated no longer, but threw up the window to its utmost.

The cool air swept in like water, purging out the hot night vapours. She shut down the window again and locked it.

A shiver came from the bed where the sick man lay.

CHAPTER XLII

THE dappled sea was booming on the rocks. All day a storm had raged. The beach was strewn with *débris*—weedy, stringy spars, torn from the old worn jetty, fragments of broken boats, slimy masses of seaweed, brown and green and black. The night was still and warm. There was no moon. A double line of gas-lamps on the pier, culminating in a great blaze of yellow at the pierhead, threw a dancing light upon the sea. Behind the twinkling eyes of the town the stern cliffs rose to the sombre sky.

Eva had come down to this place to rest and recoup.

John Coldershaw was dead and buried. His mother had returned to her old lonely life—a little harder and narrower for the relief his presence afforded her. Eva had made timid overtures of goodwill to the intractable old woman: she had been repulsed with bitter harshness.

The devil is never at a loss for provender for sensation-mongers. As an item of news the murder of Alice Shallers was well enough; and had John Coldershaw been arraigned and tried, it would have made a delectable piece of reading for Sundays; but the death of the suspected man had robbed the episode of dramatic roundness and finish—it was left ragged at the edges, and altogether unworthy of presentation to a discriminating public. A divorce superseded and eclipsed it. It was relegated to oblivion. The name of John Coldershaw did not transpire; the papers had only a right to report that a suspect had died under arrest; and interest in the affair being of a very lukewarm kind, they did not trouble to exceed their right. Thus the incident was closed, as Eva had foreseen it would be. She had won her release. And the shadow was removed from her children. . . . She should have been happy with her life in her hands, plastic, ready to be moulded to her will. She was young, strong, beautiful, and prosperous; she had her children and a plenitude of friends who, if they did not love

her—and some did—were agreeable enough, and quite to her taste. Had she social ambitions? In these democratic days an abstract dressmaker is better than a concrete duchess. Did she desire a husband? There was one very proper man, simple enough to be faithful, waiting in South Africa for her to whistle him. Yet she went down to the beach on this still, warm night (like the discontented princess in the golden palace) to indulge a sad mind in solitude.

She walked slowly over the rolling stones, until she turned a corner of cliff where the turmoil of the town was cut off. She sat down on a rough, wooden bench and looked out across the water. The darkness rose up like a wall, sheer from the margin of the sea. The white waves, hissing at her feet, might have been the fringe of a curtain hanging from heaven to earth, hiding a world where people played at life.

And she was a thing apart—remote—out in the cold void.

THE END

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